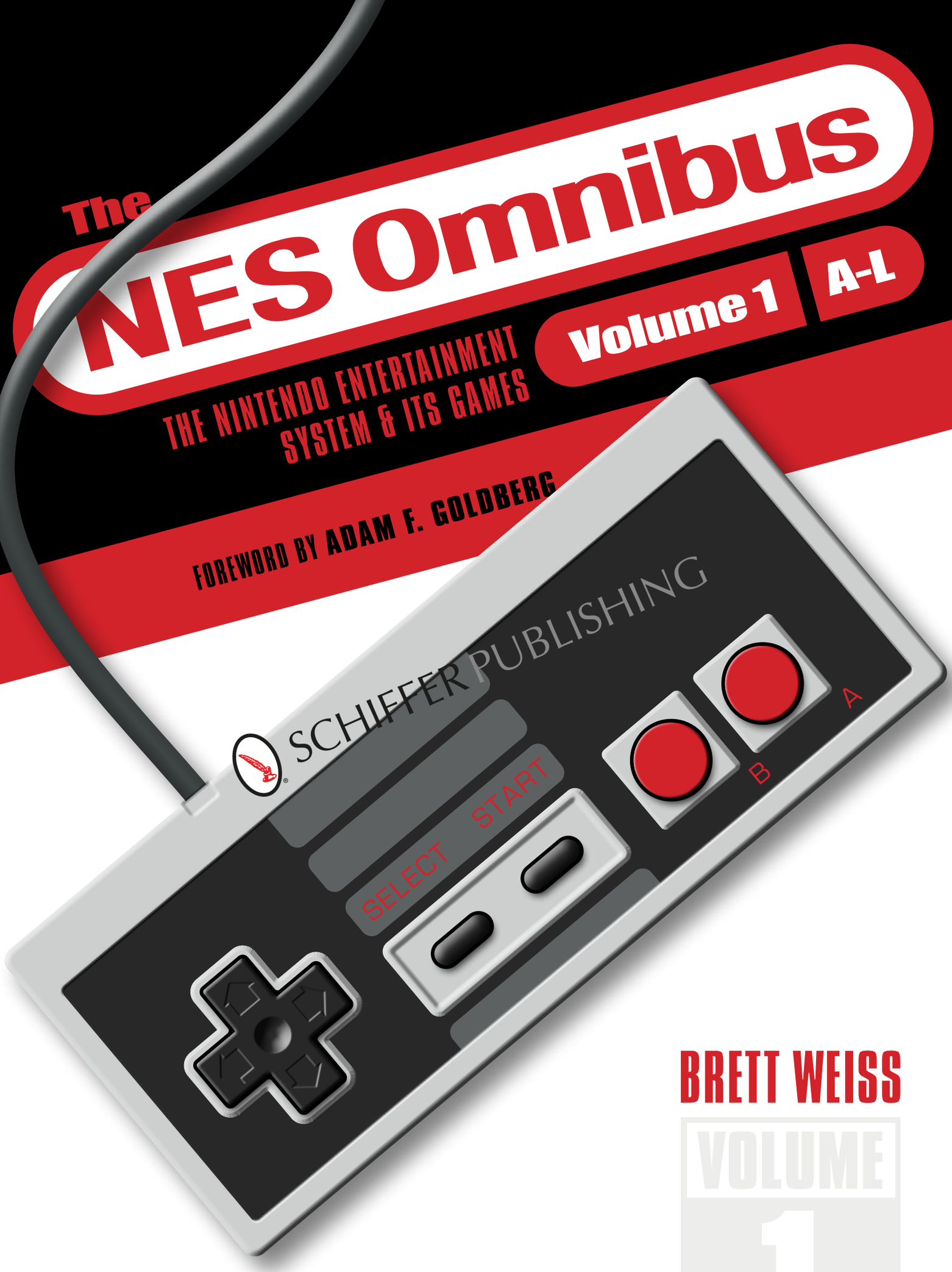
The NES Omnibus

Volume 1 A-L

THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM & ITS GAMES

FOREWORD BY ADAM F. GOLDBERG



BRETT WEISS

VOLUME 1

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FOREWORD BY ADAM F. GOLDBERG

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VOLUME 1

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

4880 Lower Valley Road • Atglen, PA 19310

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BEETLEJUICE
Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

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This book is dedicated to everyone who has shared my books, articles, and videos on social media. It's also dedicated to the many convention promoters who have had me out as a guest author, including: Dan Iacovelli and Todd Friedman (Video Game Summit); David Kaelin (Classic Game Fest); Rick Weis, Toby Wickwire, and Chuck Van Pelt (Portland Retro Gaming Expo); Gary Carnuche (Corgs); John Lester (Game On Expo); Joseph Edward (RetroGames Show); Micah Keyan and Jesse Hardesty (Name Your Game Expo); Keith Christensen (Houston Arcade Expo); Paul Truitt (Too Many Games); Ryan Shapiro and Joel Albino (Long Island Retro Gaming Expo); Chad Hager, Charlie Shaw, Jason Hoeft, and Jake Friedel (Mo Game Con); Billy Chaser and Jay Hunter (Retropalooza); and Darren Sulfridge and the Let's Play Gaming Expo team.

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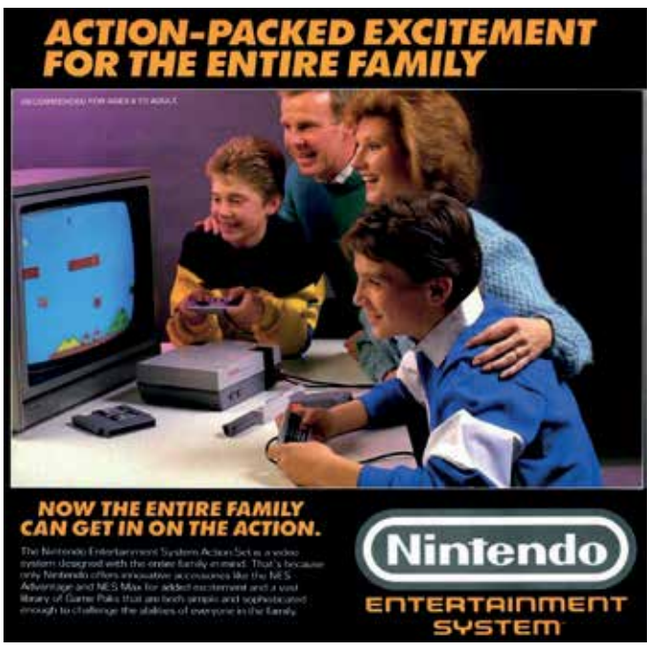
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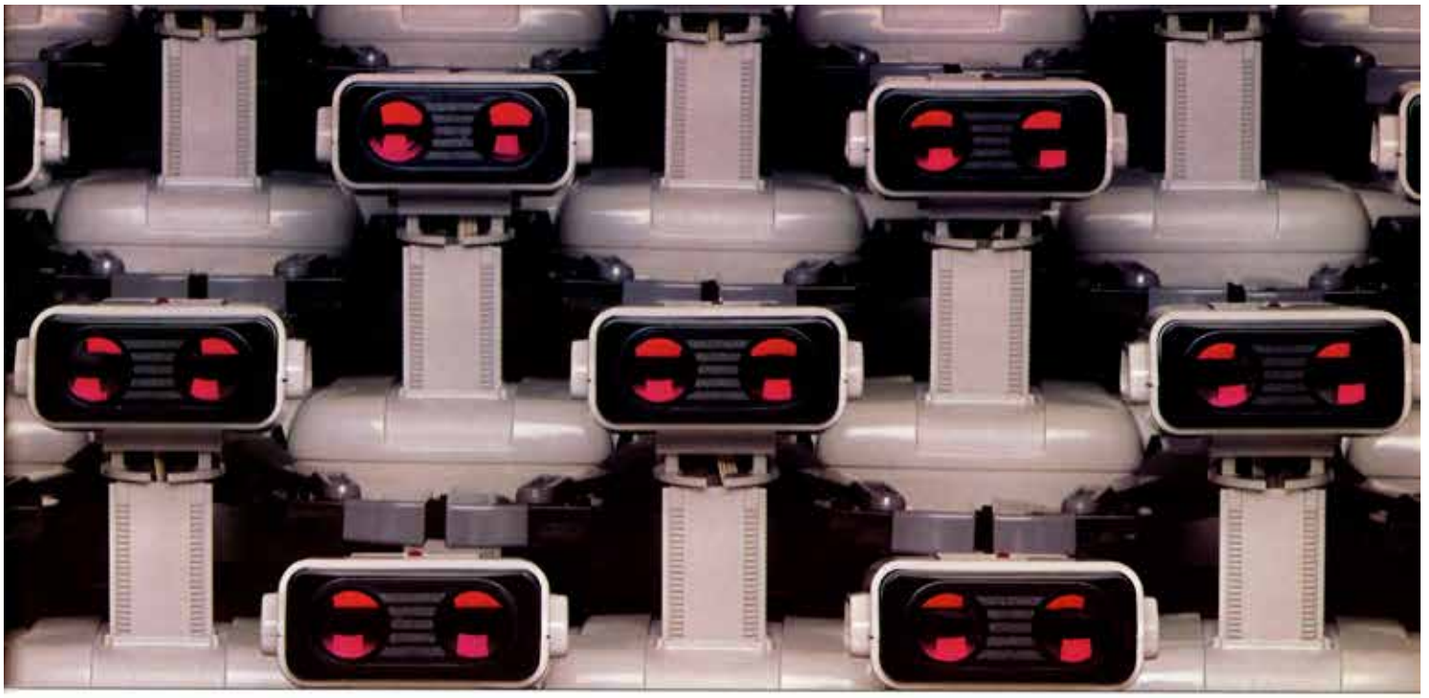

SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS.

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FOREWORD

by Adam F. Goldberg

Dude, look at those graphics! It's like having an arcade in your house!!!

Those were the EXACT words I screamed when I laid my eyes on the Nintendo Entertainment System for the very first time. The moment has been vividly burned into my brain. It was January 1986. I was sleeping over at my friend John Gaines' house. I assumed we'd spend the night making prank calls, eating Fritos, and playing his ColecoVision, as we did at most of our sixth-grader sleepovers. But my pal had a new game system, one that he boldly declared was infinitely better than ColecoVision, Intellivision, and Atari put together. It was called NINTENDO.

At that point the system only had a handful of titles to its name, but that didn't matter, because one of those games was *Super Mario Bros.* I vividly remember sitting on John's bed, watching in sheer awe as that little plumber shot fireballs and dodged jellyfish and used drainpipes as warp zones. It really did put Atari to shame. The Mario brothers made Pitfall Harry look like a total ass clown. In that moment I knew the future had arrived; and it was called Nintendo.

When my mom picked me up the next morning I was fully converted to a Nintendo kid and never wanted anything more in my life. Just one problem: my frugal parents had JUST upgraded me to an Atari 7800 for Hanukkah, which at that moment I thought was the future of gaming. Murray Goldberg could not understand how the new and improved Atari was deemed obsolete a mere two weeks after he purchased it. I desperately tried to explain that the Nintendo had superior graphics and cooler games. Hell, it came with a friggin' gun that let you hunt ducks, and a robot named R.O.B. that . . . did something. No one really knew, but still! Owning a Nintendo system was like having an arcade in your den! Think of all the quarters our family would save! It pays for itself! What's not to understand!?

Naturally my old man refused to make the leap to Nintendo because our family had already invested a pretty penny into the Atari. I had a ton of games, an official Tron joystick, and a sweet hard-shell carrying case to lug around the Atari console. Buying an NES game system was a battle that raged on in the Goldberg house for the next four agonizing years. Luckily, my best friend, Chad Kremp, lived across the street and he owned a Commodore 64 which his parents had bought in 1982. The Nintendo upgrade was a much easier sell to his parents. The moment Chad got a Nintendo for his birthday it meant that I owned a Nintendo by proxy. It didn't matter that I mostly sat and watched him play; I was thrilled to be Nintendo adjacent, and it was glorious!

I'm proud to say that many of my fondest childhood memories center around playing video games in my best friend's room. I'm convinced that Chad and I are so deeply bonded largely in part to beating games like *Contra*, *Mega Man II*, *Kid Icarus*, and *Metal Gear*. Even though, again, I watched most of the time. We had inside jokes for each game. To this day we still randomly call each other and say "I'm still in Okinawa," a reference to how we could never beat the typhoon level of the *Karate Kid* game. We even came up with our own nonsensical lyrics to the chiptune game soundtracks, my favorite being "RAMMA LAMMA JAMMA!" from the castle level of *Super Mario Bros.*

Chad and I even spent an entire summer creating our own *Legend of Zelda* map, planting bombs on every screen to uncover every single secret cave. The idea was to sell photos of our map at school, netting us a pretty penny. Unfortunately *Nintendo Power* released an awesome three-page foldout cheat map, instantly destroying our brilliant business scheme. Most people would say that we completely wasted three months of our lives charting a Zelda map but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

The greatest part of creating *The Goldbergs* TV show is that I've met many people on Facebook and Twitter that also cite the NES as a formative part of their childhoods. I always thought I was alone, but it turns out that being an NES kid is a universal experience. One we all still cherish to this day.

Being an NES kid means you know the Contra Code by heart and you had a subscription to *Nintendo Power* magazine.

It means you smacked the power pad with your hands because it made the games easier, and you madly blew into the guts of your cartridge when your Nintendo would glitch out.

It means you desperately wanted a Power Glove after seeing *The Wizard* . . . even though you never actually ended up buying one.

It means you felt a rush of adrenaline every time your player got into a hockey fist fight in *Blades of Steel*.

It means you never felt as cool as when you taught a friend the Infinite 1-Ups trick in *Super Mario Bros.*

It means you bought an NES Advantage because it would help you cheat in *Track & Field*.

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It means you played countless rounds of *Ghosts 'n Goblins* but never could get past stage one, because "F" that game.

It means you know that repeatedly punching in A-B-B-A gives you endless lives in *Ikari Warriors* . . . unless you accidentally reappear behind a wall, which meant game over.

It means you still debate to this day if *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* is better than *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*. Not that I actually played either; I just had to sit and watch Chad play. But part two sure looked better!

It means that your friend had an uncle who had a brother who had a second cousin who could actually beat Mike Tyson in *Punch-Out!!* Of course, you knew this was impossible because you typed in the 007-373-5963 code a million times and still never came close to beating the lightning-fast dude.

In late 1989, we Goldbergs finally became a Nintendo family. My mom was tired of hearing me say "I'm going over to Chad's to play Nintendo" every weekend. All Beverly Goldberg ever wanted was to have her kids under her roof, and it drove her bonkers that Nintendo stood in the way. Naturally, my Dad was beyond aggravated that my Atari 7800 had spent the last several years collecting dust in my closet. Thanks to pressure from my "smother" Murray Goldberg finally broke down and bought me a Nintendo Entertainment System for my birthday in eighth grade. At long last I would be playing with power!

For a few months at least.

In 1991, the Super Nintendo was released, and dammit, I never wanted anything more. Needless to say my Dad was not receptive to the idea of upgrading our now-obsolete NES to the newer, cooler, 16-bit Super NES. I tried to explain that the SNES actually did have the graphics of arcade games, if not better. Yes, I may have said that when the NES was released—but this time it was true!

Goes without saying, but I never got my Nintendo upgrade and still have my classic NES from eighth grade. To this day I am still an NES kid and still love those old-school games . . . even though Chad was the one who actually played them as I sat and watched. Not sure if I mentioned that.

—Adam F. Goldberg

Adam F. Goldberg created the TV series *Breaking In*, *Imaginary Mary*, and *The Goldbergs*, as well as the spinoff *Schooled*. Adam wrote the screenplays for *Fanboys*, *Aliens in the Attic*, and *How to Train Your Dragon*. He also produced a number of retro video game documentaries, including *The New 8 Bit Heroes*, *Button Bashers*, *Bits of Yesterday*, and *The Power of Glove*.

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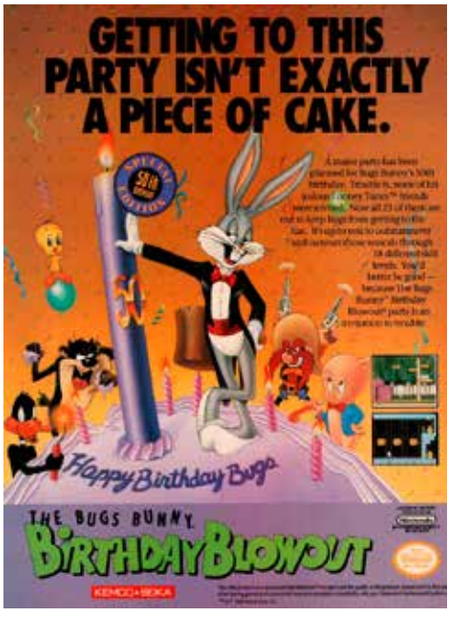

Enjoy Hudson
JACKIE CHAN's
ACTION KUNG FU
Ready... Set... POW!!! It's a Black Belt Blowout with JACKIE CHAN'S ACTION KUNG FU
HUDSON SOFT

PREFACE

In 1984, the Japanese company Nintendo, which had achieved tremendous success in the arcades with *Donkey Kong* (1981), approached Atari about distributing the American version of their popular Famicom system in the United States. For a variety of reasons (which Steven L. Kent details in his indispensable *The Ultimate History of Video Games*) the prospective deal with Atari failed, and Nintendo took it upon itself to test market their Americanized Famicom—dubbed the Nintendo Entertainment System—in New York City in 1985, leading to a nationwide release in 1986.

Initially, due to the fabled Great Video Game Crash of 1983, US retailers were wary of carrying a new video game system. Wisely, Nintendo marketed their brainchild as more than just a simple game console, packaging the deluxe version of the NES with a mechanical Robot Operating Buddy (R.O.B. for short) and a Zapper light gun (for use with *Duck Hunt* and other target shooting games). They emphasized the "entertainment system" branding of their video game console and referred to its cartridges as "game paks."

This only semi-deceptive marketing ploy was helpful in getting the Nintendo NES on store shelves, but the true success of the system—at least initially—can be attributed to a little side-scrolling platformer called *Super Mario Bros.*, which a[illegible]nished grizzled gamers and video virgi[illegible]with its rich colors and sounds, cartoonis[illegible]ics, lengthy levels, freedom of movement, and hidden secrets and surprises. Those of us who grew up on comparatively primitive previous consoles, such as the Atari 2600 and the ColecoVision, were truly mesmerized by *Super Mario Bros.*' epic nature and expansive gameplay.

Scores of other landmark first-party NES titles followed in the wake of *Super Mario Bros.*, including *Metroid* and *The Legend of Zelda*, and the company began publishing the long-running *Nintendo Power* magazine in 1988. The NES hit its zenith in 1990, with the introduction of *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Released in the wake of the feature film *The Wizard* (1989), which was more or less an extended commercial for the game, *Super Mario Bros. 3* sold more than 18 million copies worldwide, making it the best-selling video game cartridge until that point. *The Wizard* also showcased the technically advanced Power Glove controller (which you can read about extensively in an essay later in this book), a black and gray gauntlet that looked really cool and created a lot of buzz but was extremely inefficient and lacking in precision of movement when it came to actually playing games.

Numerous third-party companies, such as Capcom, Jaleco, and Data East, got in on the NES act. In fact, Konami's *Contra* and *Castlevania* are two of the most fondly remembered games for the system. In a marginally successful attempt to keep third parties from cranking out lousy and/or unlicensed games Nintendo had built a lockout chip into the console and forced third-party companies to pay substantial licensing fees to produce games for the console. Additionally, third party companies could only produce five games per year, a rule that certain companies circumvented by forming sister companies. Other companies, like Tengen and Sachen, bypassed Nintendo altogether by producing unlicensed games. Authorized game cartridges have an official Nintendo seal of approval (or seal of quality) on the packaging, but that doesn't necessarily guarantee a great game (as owners of the dreadful *Hydlide* will attest).

During its lifespan the two-tone gray, boxy looking NES was a staple in homes across America, selling tens of millions of units before its official demise in 1995 (the last Nintendo-brand NES game, *Wario's Woods*, was released in 1994). One of the best, most enduring things about the system is its sturdy, user friendly controllers, which are rectangular in shape and feature an eight-way directional pad on the left, a select and a start button in the middle, and a pair of action buttons on the right. This design, which was patterned after Nintendo's Game & Watch series of handheld games, is vastly superior to controllers for previous systems, all of which have at least one overriding flaw. The NES Advantage joystick is a nice alternative to the standard controller for such maze games as *Pac-Man* and *Trog!* Also noteworthy are the two multi-player adapters for the console: the NES Satellite and the NES Four Score.

When the NES reached toy and department stores near me in 1986, I heard good things from friends and various media outlets, but I figured I didn't need to own the next-gen console because my Atari 2600, ColecoVision, Intellivision, and Odyssey2 were keeping me plenty busy—I had all four hooked up in my bedroom. For Christmas 1987, my older brother stunned me by getting me the parent-level gift of an NES. I was excited to play *Hogan's Alley* because I had enjoyed it in the arcades, but *Super Mario*

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Bros. absolutely blew my mind. Countless other epic titles would find their way into my collection in the coming months and years, including such triple-A titles as *The Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid*, *Contra*, *Castlevania*, and *Double Dragon*. I enjoyed countless lesser (though still epic in my mind) games as well, such as *Karnov*, *Trojan*, *Tiger-Heli*, and *Kid Niki: Radical Ninja*.

No game system is perfect, and the NES does have one notable setback: the original iteration of the console lacks durability. Dusty or heavily used cartridges can render the system unreliable by gumming up or otherwise making the intake port less than reliable in loading games. Frequent usage can loosen the connector pins in the intake port, resulting in the loss of connectivity between the cartridge and the console. Finding a used system that works perfectly can be difficult. Nintendo remedied this design flaw in 1993 with the release of a top-loading version of the console, but it was produced in small quantities and is therefore hard to find in today's collector market. Fortunately, you can purchase modern alternatives that play original NES carts, such as the Retron 5 by Hyperkin and the AVS Advanced Video System Console by RetroUSB.

Along with the Atari 2600 and Sony's original PlayStation, the Nintendo Entertainment System is one of the most important, most influential, most iconic video game systems ever released. It is home to an astonishing number of revolutionary, genre-defining titles, and it popularized and expanded upon such concepts as beating levels, saving progress (via passwords or battery backup), and exploring vast, lavishly illustrated worlds. Most importantly, it revived—make that resurrected—the American home console video game industry.

Today, the NES remains a popular system among hardcore collectors and casual fans alike. For those of you who don't want to bother with amassing a bunch of cartridges, select game titles are available for download on the Nintendo Switch. Or you can pick up an NES Classic plug-and-play unit. Whichever way you decide to enjoy the NES, have fun on your adventures, and thanks for reading *The NES Omnibus*!

—Brett Weiss

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Special thanks to my loving wife, Charis, whom I pepper with questions on an almost daily basis, and my kids, Ryan and Katie, who always make me proud. And thanks to my wonderful mom, who is always there for us.

If you're not buying your Nintendo at Toys "R" Us, you're simply paying too much.
NEW GAME SYSTEMS AND THE HOTTEST TITLES FOR LESS.
The hottest new games of the year are coming in by the truckload every week: we've got 'em for less!
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Sudden Death.
If you thought soccer was a game for the rest of the world, here's America's answer. A fanatical crowd, a full team of 11, and action so precise, so powerful, so *awesome*, you can almost taste it. Win or lose, one thing's certain: GOAL!™ will win you over.
At your favorite video game store now!
JALECO
GOAL!
JALECO
Serious sports.
For serious players.

Nintendo NES Games A–L

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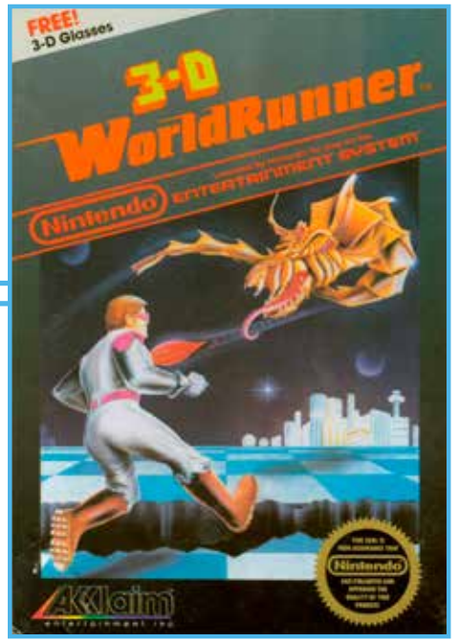
Nintendo
All the accessories to make your system sing!
ADVANTAGE JOYSTICK
Give your game the advantage of an arcade-style joystick with turbo feature for increased fire power. 1-2 players.
POWER PAD
Innovative power pad puts the world at your feet, providing dynamic foot control for special games.
NES CLEANING KIT
NINTENDO CLEANING KIT
For peak performance, clean up your act with the kit that cleans contacts in seconds.
ZAPPER LIGHT GUN
Radical! Zap 'em from up to 15' away, with nothing to stand between you and total victory.
MAX JOYPAD
Take your game to the max. Rotating thumb control gives you 360° movement, and twin turbos are the ultimate power trip.
THE WORLD'S BIGGEST TOY STORE!
TOYS "R" US
Toys "R" Us is the world's biggest toy store, with over 400 stores coast to coast. Check your phone book for the store nearest you! We accept Visa, Mastercard, American Express and Discover.

3-D WorldRunner

PUBLISHER: Acclaim
DEVELOPER: Square
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



At first glance *3-D WorldRunner*, which is also known as *The 3-D Battles of WorldRunner*, looks like a *Space Harrier* clone, thanks to its behind-the-runner perspective. There's much more jumping involved, setting it apart from that coin-op classic. To protect Solar System #517, you must run through eight a[illegible]rlds, leaping over large chasms, dodgi[illegible]ing towers, and firing missiles at alien serpent beasts and their minions, including robot heads, roving hands, dog faces, mean TVs, and seashells. You can grab power-ups and weapons, including power potion (invincibility), junior jumpers and super jumpers (higher and farther jumping ability), and laser missiles (unlimited firing power), but you should avoid mushrooms, since they are poisonous. Grabbing warp balloons takes you to bonus rounds where there are no enemies. As with *Rad Racer*, the game was originally packaged with special glasses that give the colorful visuals a rich, surprisingly clear 3-D look. If you like *Space Harrier 3-D* for the Master System you should definitely check out this game.

Notable Quotable:
"Quite long and challenging for an NES game, and a nice mix of different genres . . . The sprites and backgrounds are well done for their time. The music is pretty quirky, albeit repetitive . . . It's always fun to take a walk down memory lane and still be greatly challenged. It's also interesting to look at how obscure and unadopted augmented 3-D technology was in the '80s." —Mark Freedman (gamecola.net)

Notable Quotable:
"*3-D WorldRunner* is one of the better games from the NES's early years and a title every fan of the system simply has to own. I even recommend it to gamers from the modern era because it's quite a challenge, especially the later levels where you need to learn to jump on pillars and the well-named towering infernos . . .less-experienced games can have fun as well because it's a great game to jump into that gets progressively difficult instead of throwing you all the tricks at once." —Game Freaks (gamefreaks365.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The game may be simple, but it's not easy. It moves quickly, and if you're not careful, you could easily lose a life. Mistime a jump and you'll end up in a crater. Fail to sneak past those pesky hands that constantly block your movement and you may fall victim to the merciless time limit. Waste too many lives, or fail to gather extras in the bonus worlds, and you may not have enough for the boss at the end of each world . . .*3-D WorldRunner* is best for killing an hour while waiting for your next class or thinking of something to do. It's fun for a while, but grows old quickly as you realize you're encountering the same enemies and jumping the same gaps, just with occasional tweaks to make it more challenging." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

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Insider Insight: I never played *3-D WorldRunner* as a child. I can't recall even a single one of my friends owning it. Nevertheless, it piqued my curiosity as an adult after I discovered it was programmed by the legendary Nasir Gebelli, the software whiz responsible for *Rad Racer*, *Secret of Mana*, and the first three *Final Fantasy* titles. So off to eBay I went in search of a cartridge that also included the original 3-D glasses. I managed to procure a complete-in-box copy surprisingly cheap.

This lack of buyer demand should have tipped me off, because the game was a letdown. To be fair, the technical wizardry is amazing for the early NES era—Gebelli was truly a programing savant, and to coax realistic looking 3-D scrolling graphics on an 8-bit platform is an astounding accomplishment. But even the best film directors are limited when working with a mediocre script, and frankly the game felt overly repetitive. There are only so many times you can jump over the same gap in the floor in the same manner before the novelty wears off. Further, I better enjoyed the game without the 3-D glasses than with.

I can see how the gameplay elements I find boring as an adult might engage a child or teen much longer. Indeed, I ended up giving the game to my teenage cousin Chip, who although very much a member of the PS4/Xbox One generation, has loved old school games ever since I gave him an NES a few years back. Alas, he hardly played *3-D WorldRunner*, instead favoring another game I gave him at the same time, *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Can't say I disagree with his choice! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

The 3-D Battles of
WORLD RUNNER
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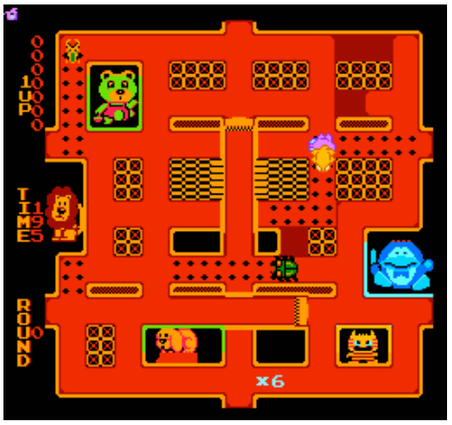
LICENSED BY NINTENDO OF AMERICA INC.
PRESS START

6 in 1

PUBLISHER: Caltron/Myriad Games
DEVELOPER: NTDEC/Mega Soft
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



As the title suggests, this release features six games in one cartridge. With its behind-the-runner perspective *Cosmos Cop* is somewhat similar to *Space Harrier*, with the titular character firing a cannon and neutron missiles at alien invaders and their installations and defenses. *Porter* is a *Shove It* puzzler where you push boxes to pos[illegible] that are marked by stars. *Booky Man*, which is similar to *Crush Roller*, has you guiding a beetle through a maze, cleaning streets while avoiding lizards and a "bugger." In *Magic Carpet*—a side-scrolling shooter that evokes *Magical Chase*—you fly over Baghdad, firing arrows at goblins. Similar to *Buster Bros.*, *Balloon Monster* has you walking around shooting bouncing balloons. In *Adam and Eve*, which is a *Balloon Fight* clone, you, as Adam, glide on a balloon, trying to pop the evil serpent's balloon while keeping their balloon from being popped. A second player can join in as Eve. Each title is clearly inferior to the game(s) that inspired it. Unlicensed. After Caltron went under, Myriad bought out all the unsold copies of *6 in 1* and sold the cartridges under their own brand name. Both versions are extremely rare, with the Caltron version a little easier to find.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Other than the very generic title screen, the overall graphics are actually pretty decent. If you compare the graphics to *Action 52*, it looks like frickin' *Contra* . . . While these games are not without flaws, most of them are actually pretty decent." —Snoop's Den (YouTube)

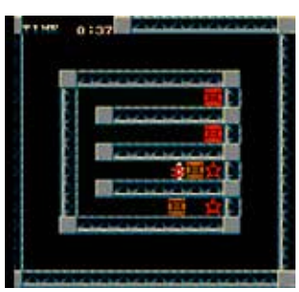
Notable Quotable:

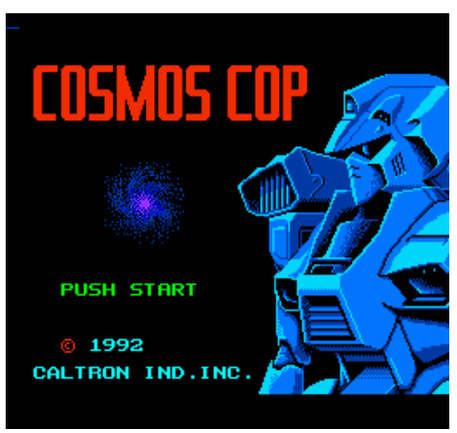
"The origin of Caltron *6 in 1* might be more interesting than the game itself. The game is packed with subpar clones of games that are much better than it. There really is no reason to own this game unless you're an extremely hardcore NES collector, and even then I wouldn't recommend it for the games inside." —DubiousGamingOnline (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Caltron *6 in 1* has one of the more interesting back stories of any NES game. It was first released in 1992 by Caltron, a Taiwanese company who had never produced a game prior to *6 in 1*. They released it on the American markets and promptly went out of business. Myriad, another soon-to-be-doomed company, bought the rest of the *6 in 1* cartridges, re-labeled them as *6 in 1* Myriad, and sold them on the market. As expected Myriad went out of business shortly after, and the actual cartridges for Caltron *6 in 1* or Myriad *6 in 1* are worth upwards of a couple thousand dollars on the market . . . These six games could have been a lot worse. I was expecting an *Action 52* tragedy, not six half-hearted but surprisingly playable attempts at a video game." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

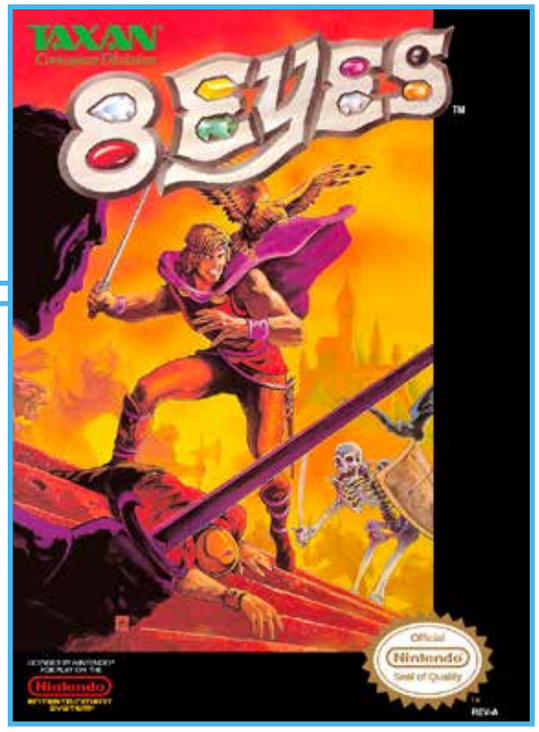
Memories: *6 in 1* reminds me of those cheap knockoff games imported from Taiwan or China (or wherever) that you see at certain disreputable flea markets (as opposed to all the reputable ones, ha ha) containing upwards of 50 to 100 games. However, said imports are typically even cheaper in quality and more glitch-prone than this lousy cartridge.





8 Eyes

PUBLISHER: Taxan
DEVELOPER: Thinking Rabbit
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



A playable but flawed platformer, *8 Eyes* is set in the distant future, hundreds of years after a nuclear war. To rebuild the planet, the Great King has used eight magical jewels called "Eyes." Unfortunately, his evil rivals each steal an Eye to gain control of the world. As Orin the Falconer, you must make things right by battling your way through eight castles, using swords and a variety of special weapons (daggers, boomerangs, Molotov cocktails, and the like) to defeat soldiers, living skeletons, giant wasps, mud men, and other creatures. The game looks and plays a lot like *Castlevania* (but is nowhere near as good), right down to the sub weapons, floating enemies, and many stairs to climb. Levels must be finished in the correct order, as each boss is only vulnerable to one type of sword, similar to the strategy in *Mega Man*. Also like *Mega Man*, stages are selectable. Unfortunately, there is no *Castlevania*-like whip to wield, but Orin can whip out Cutrus the fighting falcon, which can be controlled by a second player. Levers and buttons must sometimes be used to open doors, giving the game additional depth.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"A decent imitation of *Castlevania*. The multiple country selection adds variety to an otherwise average game. Nothing spectacular ever appears, but the gameplay is slightly above average." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1990)

Notable Quotable:

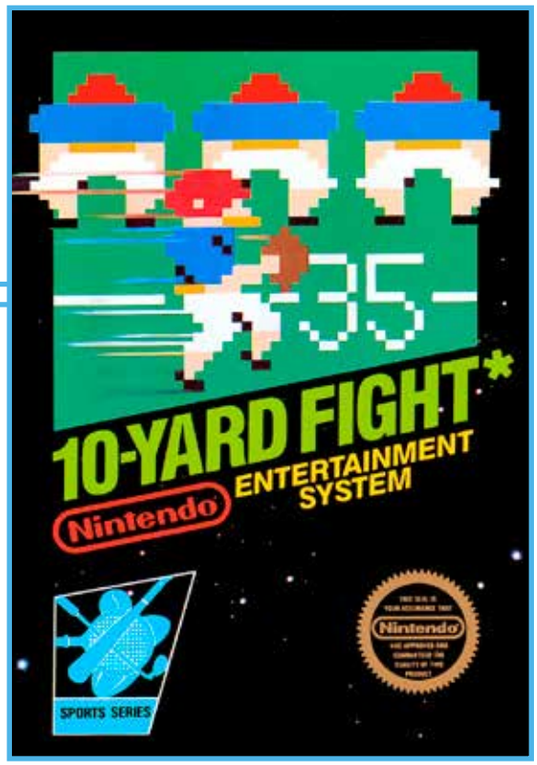
"I really wanted to play *8 Eyes* when I was young. All I had to go on were a few scant screenshots in my comic books . . .looked like the coolest game in the world. It was *Castlevania* with a falcon buddy—how could it go wrong? Oh, you have no idea . . .*8 Eyes* is broken on nearly every level and should be avoided at all costs . . . Orin's sword has pathetic range. Every enemy's attack range dwarfs your own, which leads to hits in almost every exchange. Your sub-weapons are strong but use up far too much energy . . .decent production values . . .could have been interesting. You can see the kernels of a good game but it is buried under awful execution." —Classic-Games.Net

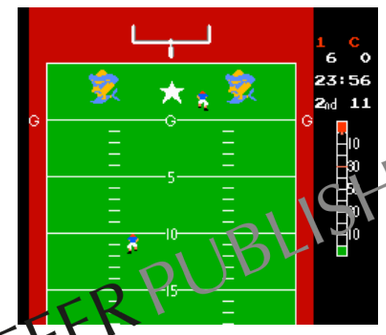
Notable Quotable:

"This game royally sucks . . . Each location features distinctive music and architecture, but enemies tend to be reused between them. The one thing that gives *8 Eyes* some semblance of originality is your bird sidekick. Although he's normally perched on your shoulder, he can be controlled independently to attack enemies and collect hard-to-reach items. Unfortunately, his counterintuitive controls will have you throwing up your hands in disgust . . . Controlling your character isn't much better . . .collision detection sucks . . . The music sounds exotic but gets monotonous once it starts to loop. The final nail in the coffin is how it's necessary to complete the locations in a specific order to win the game! This game is already difficult enough without such a stupid, arbitrary rule." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

10-Yard Fight

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Irem
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1985



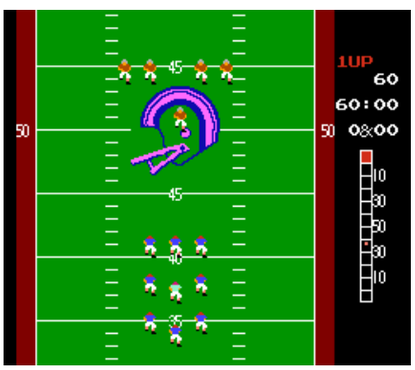


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Based on the 1983 Irem arcade game, *10-Yard Fight* was the first football cartridge released for the NES and a system launch title. Viewed from overhead, well above the playfield, the game fields nine players per team (as opposed to 11 in real football). The quarterback appears in shotgun formation and can run, pass, or toss the ball to one of two running backs. Be careful, since your opponent can intercept the ball. Shaking off would-be tacklers is a big part of the game, as is zigzagging up the field to get them off your tail. On defense, gamers control a single player (a safety, linebacker, or corner) that can pull off a fairly ridiculous flying tackle maneuver. Five difficulty levels are available: high school, college, pro, play off, and Super Bowl (sans licensing from the NFL). There are no penalties, but the game does feature extra points, field goals, punts, and safeties.

Notable Quotable:

"Regardless of your love or hatred of football games, one can agree: *10-Yard Fight* is mediocre at the very best. I have to at least give it credit for following the basic gist of how football works . . . even as a forerunner this game is not very fun. Pick up a superior Tecmo offering instead." —Sharkberg (sharkberg.com)



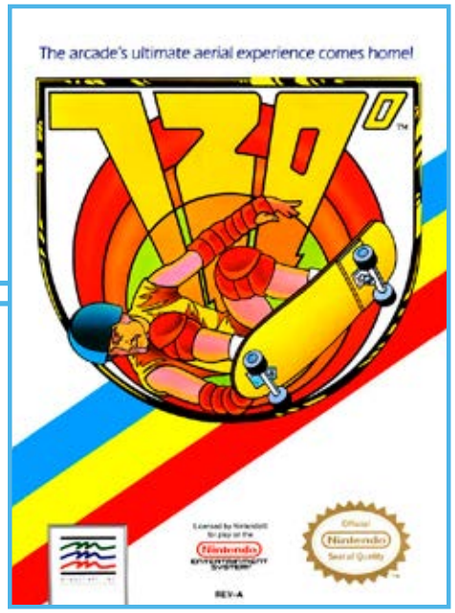
Insider Insight: It was autumn 1990, and I was thoroughly obsessed with *Super Mario Bros. 3* and a handful of borrowed games from friends ever since I finally got my own NES Control Deck for my birthday that summer. It had taken a few years and several rounds of negotiation with my parents to make NES ownership a reality. One of their strongest arguments against my cause had been about the cost of the games, which was around 50 dollars per cartridge. The battle to obtain the console and my first game (*SMB3*) had been won, but the outlook for the war for library expansion appeared grim.

That is, until a friend tipped me off to a local business that was selling used NES games at reduced prices. I was super excited and made a beeline home to break the news to my mom. Her enthusiasm didn't quite match my own, but she was receptive to the idea of checking it out and possibly making a purchase within a limit.

I entered Don's Deli with a head brimming with possibility and youthful exuberance. The selection of games didn't disappoint. However, their price tags, coupled with the parental spending cap, did narrow the field of candidates significantly. Ultimately I chose *10-Yard Fight*. As a neophyte NFL fan and someone who appreciated variety in gaming style, it seemed like the perfect fit for the second addition to my NES library, even if it was just the cartridge only. While it lacked the flash and depth of successor football titles like *Tecmo Bowl*, it was the perfect entry-level football title for a young gamer like me. Moreover, I gained a healthy appreciation for the old-school NFL "three yards and a cloud of dust" offensive style that still resonates with me today. —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one-half of Team Mayh3m, featured in the *Nintendo Quest* documentary

720°

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Sports/ Skateboarding, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Want to skateboard without the risk of skinning your knees or bumping your noggin? Try *720°*, a simplified, though nicely realized port of Atari's highly influential 1986 arcade game that benefited from a spinning controller, voice effects, and a pair of boom box-like speakers. You skate around The [redacted] Park hub course (viewed from an isometric perspective), avoiding cars, thugs, motorcycle riders, and frisbee-throwing freaks and scoring points by performing mid-air spins and jumping over water and off ramps. Money for purchasing helmets, shoes, pads, and skateboards in the four available shops can be picked up in the streets and earned in four events: Downhill, Slalom, Jump, and Ramp. You can perform a variety of tricks in the game in addition to spinning and jumping, including handstand, skating handstand, and slide. To fit the perceived demographic of the average NES owner, the skateboarder in this version of the game is much younger looking than his coin-op counterpart. If you like the *Tony Hawk* series and want to explore its roots try this game.

Notable Quotable:

"Some arcade games just don't translate to the home systems well and *720* is a good example. While it looks like *720*, that's about it. The handling is difficult, and because of this it just does not play well. If you can't control your character then gameplay becomes frustrating." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Although this only has four events, they combine together to produce an entertaining game . . .isn't difficult to get into, but once you get to higher levels it becomes very tough indeed, with the bees swarming after you at very high speed—you have to plan ahead and skate like mad to get to the next event before they catch you . . .an entertaining and original game." —*Mean Machines* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Your skater is animated well, though he looks a little too childish, and the skate park itself is nicely organized with a decent amount of variety and things to look at. Some of the obstacles/enemies look odd, but they fit the 'cartoony' style of your character, so I guess they're somewhat permissible. Different than the arcade, but I suppose they follow the theme throughout. Still, the color scheme on most enemies is pretty bland . . .not too strong in the sound department . . . The main theme for the skate park as you move about is a little too cheery, very reminiscent of *Paperboy* . . .gameplay is interesting in construction, but does not play out very well . . .high score for creativity . . . I do play this game now and then, but really only for nostalgia." —Stan Stepanic (gamefreaks365.com)

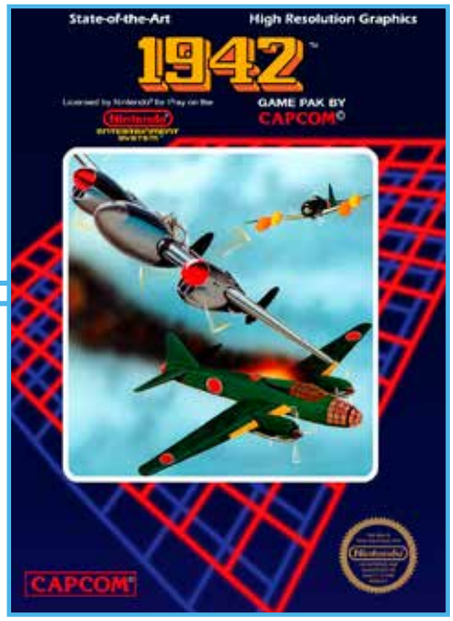
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: During the '80s and early '90s, when I was growing up, skateboarding became a big part of pop culture. I myself was a keen skateboarder. I say "keen" because as much as I tried and practiced, I was never any good and just watched in wonder at the tricks my friends could pull off. My love for those simpler times has stuck with me the same way video games have, because I remember my first skateboard perfectly. It was a Vision Gonzalez with Santa Cruz trucks and Rip II Wheels. I loved its bright colors and saved weeks and weeks of my paper route money to afford it. So what about when my two biggest loves of this period combined? Skateboarding *and* videos games—that was my idea of heaven!

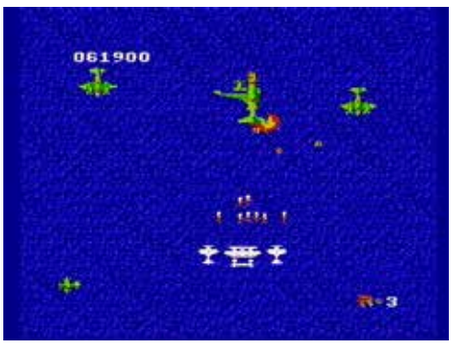
In 1986, Atari Games satisfied the dreams of kids everywhere by producing the first skateboarding arcade game, *720°*. The coin-op was hugely successful for Atari, so it's hardly a surprise that home versions followed. In 2015, I interviewed the game's creator, Paul Kwinn, as part of "The Making of 720°" feature in *Retro Gamer*. As part of my research I played every port and found Mindscape's NES translation to be by far the best of those original conversions. Paul himself agreed with me, so I'm in good company. I guess that's why it's the NES version I return to whenever I get a hankering for those times (the arcade version has some seriously weird controls!). Skate or die! What's your choice, dude? —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

1942

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Micronics
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986



Known for its looping maneuver that lets you rise up out of the way during the heat of battle, *1942* is a fun but too-easy port of Capcom's 1984 arcade game. As Super Ace, players pilot a World War II era plane over land and sea (progressing from aircraft carrier to aircraft carrier), shooting planes while dodging their bullets. You maneuver up, down, right, and left all over the screen while the action scrolls forward and enemies, which vary in size (from small planes that zigzag around up to large bombers that fire lots of bullets), approach from the top, the sides, and the rear. Destroying complete red formations emits POW power-ups that can be grabbed for double machine guns, triple firepower (an ally joins you on both sides of the plane), extra points, or an extra "loop the loop." You'll fly over 32 areas, culminating in Tokyo, where you must destroy the remaining enemy aircraft. Decent (if easy) shooting action, but the sound effects are horrible: scratchy gunfire and explosions and high-pitched pinging when you shoot.



Notable Quotable:

"Compared to the rock-hard C64 port this NES version is a breeze. Very rarely did I struggle to avoid incoming fire, and I never felt any of the intensity that the genre is known for. *1942* is a lackluster port of Capcom's arcade hit. I'd recommend avoiding this and skipping straight to its sequel (*1943: The Battle of Midway*), as it presents the player with more of a challenge and has greater depth and better gameplay mechanics." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics here are fair for an early NES title . . . Since there aren't many colors to work with bullets and planes often blend in with areas of the background, resulting in briefly invisible enemies . . . Controlling your craft feels slow and sluggish. Even *Space Invaders* on the Atari 2600 moves faster than this one. Your plane is certainly not as nimble as ships in other shooters, but it is on par with the movement of your enemies; sort of evening the odds in a particularly unexciting way." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I've never been that fond of the arcade game . . .there is little to separate one level from another . . .a barren and repetitive tone . . .port suffers from the same problem and quickly becomes tiresome and monotonous. The soundtrack is also on the dull side and consists of cacophonous morse code beeps (but to be fair, this was also the case with the original arcade game). I also find this conversion a bit on the slow side (things tend to slow down a lot), completely ruining some of the gameplay in the process . . .my advice would be to first check out the vastly superior *1943*." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Insider Insight: While I was growing up my dad never understood my love for video games. They were a complete waste of time in his mind. But for some reason he had an affinity for *1942*. He ignored any other arcade game we came across, but if he saw *1942* he'd drop a quarter in without fail.

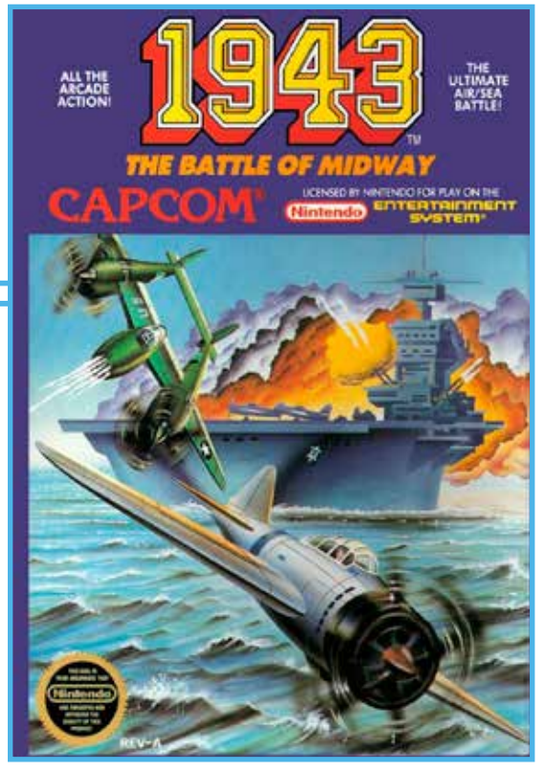
When we got our NES, he begrudgingly let my brother and I hook it up to the TV with the understanding that we'd only waste time with those video games after he'd watched the evening news and that day's *Carol Burnett* rerun. But whenever we rented *1942* he broke his own rules.

1942 may not be the best arcade port on the NES. In fact, the phrase "rough around the edges" is too kind. But especially now that my Dad has passed from this world, picking it up and playing it today brings a tear to my eye and a smile to my face. I'll always have time to press start on the old man's favorite game! —Greg Sewart, former *EGM* Previews Editor, Producer of Generation 16, Host of Player One Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

1943: The Battle of Midway

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



A fun and challenging shooter, *1943* is an expertly programmed port of Capcom's 1987 arcade game and is a nice upgrade over *1942*, despite the absence of a two player mode. You pilot a P-38 fighter plane among the clouds and over Pacific blue waters, ducking, dodging, and shooting bombers, small planes similar to your own, and massive warplanes. You'll also fly lower to battle aircraft carrier bosses, including destroying their gun turrets. There are 24 levels (up from 16 in the arcade version). As in *1942*, the plane can loop out of harm's way. You can also grab power-ups, including super shells, three-way shots, energy tanks, a shot gun, auto fire, and side fighters. Exclusive to the NES version is a password feature for saving progress and the ability for players to distribute points to power-up their plane's offensive power, defensive power, energy level, and special weapons (and the time limit for those special weapons). Unlike *1942*, you aren't given extra lives. Rather, you have an energy meter that can be filled by grabbing power-ups and completing missions.

Notable Quotable:

"The game is considerably easier if you have a turbo button, so bust out the NES Advantage, NES Max, or Nintendo Four-Score . . .Your thumbs will thank me . . .Graphically, *1943* is a mixed bag. The backgrounds are usually just dull blue, sometimes with clouds. The enemies are repetitive, and are mostly just planes and boats. However, *1943* does have an extremely impressive graphical accomplishment: no screen flicker. No matter how many planes, projectiles, or whatever I had on screen, none of their sprites flickered . . .everything runs so smoothly it's amazing to watch." —Nathan Major (sharkberg.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Boss confrontations in *1943: The Battle of Midway* are one of the game's highlights. There are only a few varieties of ship and plane that you'll face, yet each encounter feels unique because of the challenges you've faced on your way to each showdown. It's amazing just how much difference a dwindling supply of special weapons can make from one stage to the next. A ship you remember easily reducing to scrap metal a few stages ago can suddenly obliterate you several missions later . . . The shooter genre has come a long way since 1988. We've battled aliens and marveled at screen-filling explosions and walls of bullets that undulate hypnotically. There's none of that here, but it doesn't matter. *1943: The Battle of Midway* stands proud as one of the finest of its kind." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

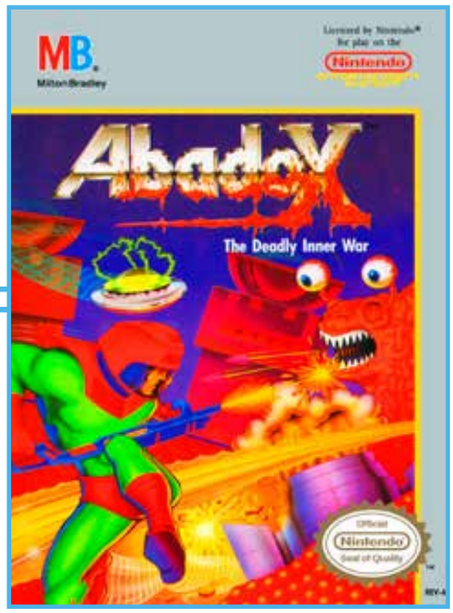
Notable Quotable:

"The NES version is a faithful adaptation of *1943* and features a number of improvements that create a deeper gameplay experience . . . Customizing the ship opens the game up to numerous different play styles, all of them viable depending on your preference . . .one of the more frantic shooters on the NES . . . Despite all of its new features, *1943* does become repetitive. You are essentially fighting the same five enemies the majority of the time . . . Capcom handled the port this time around rather than Micronics and the results are immediately evident. The terrain is more varied this time around, and despite flying over the sea for the majority of the game they've managed to change up the color and variety of the waves for some visual distinction . . .the single looping music track of *1942* has been replaced by a few ditties that, while they aren't great, are unobtrusive." —Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Abadox: The Deadly Inner War

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley
DEVELOPER: Natsume
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/ Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



If you dig hardcore side-scrollers like *Gradius*, *Life Force*, and *R-Type*, the more obscure and oddly named *Abadox* may tickle your fast-shooting fancy. Piloting a spaceship, you battle a giant creature named Parasitis, who feeds on life forms and planets (Galactus would be proud). You must survive the surface of the creature, then blast your way [illegible] throat and through its body using [illegible] guided missiles, and orbiting shields to destroy a host of interesting and even amusing enemies, including eyeballs, worms, skeleton fish, bacteria, antibodies, and other monsters. You'll also blast bosses. Power-ups to grab include super speed, an orbiting barrier shield, twin missiles, a laser gun, multi-directional beams, and more. When the action scrolls vertically the ship travels downward, which is an unusual but welcome aspect of the gameplay. Also unusual for a game produced during the era are the gruesome, graphically rich visuals featuring guts, internal organs, and the like. This is a common cartridge that is easy to find, but it's not really a mainstream title.

Notable Quotable:

"*Abadox* is little more than an average side-scrolling shoot-'em-up. The graphics are good, and the whole thing handles very well. The variety of power-ups is also welcome, especially when out to stop the large bosses. Not outstanding, but definitely very good!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Were it not for the crushing difficulty it would be a great shooter recommendation for the system . . . This is as blatant a copy of *Life Force* as you can get, as it has the same grinding teeth, arms protruding from walls . . .unfair in many situations . . .one of the better-looking games on the system . . . The music is generally excellent . . . For such a high-quality game, I am a bit surprised that *Abadox* has such a low profile. That cheesy box art certainly isn't helping." —Classic-Games.Net

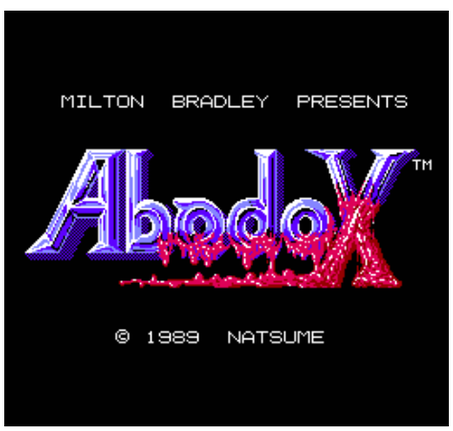
Notable Quotable:

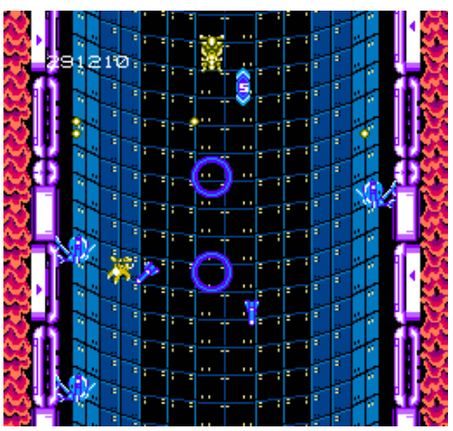
"A fairly run-of-the-mill space shmup . . . The visual style of this game is really what kept me coming back . . .it just looks amazing . . .in a totally gory, gross way . . . It all looks phenomenal, disturbing, and great . . .shooting is fairly standard . . .very difficult . . .punishing . . . Enemy placement

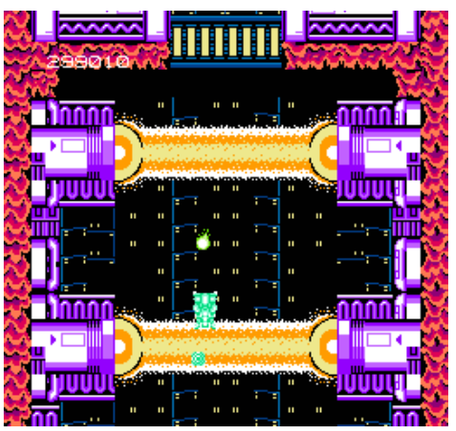
is diabolical at times, with stuff popping out from all sides and most levels being very tight corridors . . . Through intense memorization I was able to eventually beat the game, which felt like a crowning achievement." —Nathan Major (sharkberg.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Difficult and deadly . . . Everything moves fast: your ship, enemies, shots; and after a few hours of playing you're nothing but a bundle of nerves. The style of play mimics *R-Type* . . .the graphics are certainly better than average for the NES as enemies are detailed and imaginative. The boss you







SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Abadox: The Deadly Inner War

encounter in the first level is a semi-digested dog, which conveys a certain amount of revulsion not easily achievable on the system . . . The imagination applied to the graphics carries over to level design, with a fair amount of thought put into the environments . . . The two drawbacks are sporadic control and lackluster weapons. After consuming a speed power-up Lt. Nazel moves almost too fast, making him a bit unmanageable . . . While *Abadox* won't win any awards for innovation, it succeeds at being a fun game to play." —Michael Schwartz/ Joan Dykman (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight: When I was a kid, a store called Center Plaza Video opened up within walking distance of my house. It was like having all the movies and video games you could want right at your fingertips! Well, as long as I had some pocket money.

One day, while on summer break from school in 1990, I was home alone. My mom left me a few dollars in case I wanted to walk over to McDonald's to get some lunch, but I instead spent it on renting an NES game. There wasn't much to choose from, as all the other kids in the neighborhood had raided the store of its gaming wares like a bunch of hungry buzzards, so I had to settle for *Abadox*.

Since I wasn't a fan of shoot-'em-ups I wasn't exactly thrilled with my selection, but the pickings were slim. However, as I played through this shmup I was reminded of a similar game that I did enjoy—*Life Force*. Both games take place inside the body of some gigantic space creature that you're fighting to get out of, and at first I was thrilled that I was playing something similar. But the farther I got into the game, the more I realized that I just wanted to play *Life Force* instead.

Abadox looks and plays fine, but it's not nearly as polished as *Life Force*. Bullets come from every direction and most are hard to avoid, as they tend to blend into the backgrounds. The music is annoying, so I would turn the volume down and play a mixtape from songs I had recorded off the radio. I got so frustrated at one point that I used my brother's newly acquired Advantage joystick to utilize the slow-motion feature so I could actually progress in the game.

I came close to beating it, but playing in slow motion mode meant that the game was lengthened by *hours*, and by the time I reached the final level my mother and brother had come home, and he was demanding to get some NES time of his own. Naturally, since he's the younger of us he won that argument thanks to my mother intervening.

I never beat *Abadox* before I had to return it the next day, but I always wanted to, regardless of its quality. In fact, it was decades before I played *Abadox* again—2019, to be exact. There are definitely way better games out there (it's a "so bad it's good" guilty pleasure at best), but it's worth a shot if you haven't played it before. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker, and Gamer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Action 52

PUBLISHER: Active Enterprises
DEVELOPER: Active Enterprises
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

This multi-game cartridge is unlicensed, and it shows. Most of the 52 games included are cheap knockoffs of other games or are otherwise poorly programmed. Games, which span an array of genres, include *Fire Breathers*, *Star-Evil*, *Illuminator*, *G-Force Fighters*, *Ooze*, *Silver Sword*, *Critical Bypass*, *Jupiter Scope*, *Alfredo and the Fettuccine*, *Operation Full-Moon*, *Dam Busters*, *Thrusters*, *Haunted Hills of Wentworth*, *Chill-Out*, *Sharks*, *Megalonia*, *The French Baker*, *Atmos-Quake*, *Meong*, *Space Dreams*, *Streemerz*, *Spread-Fire*, *Bubblegum Rosie*, *Micro-Mike*, *Underground*, *Rocket Jockey*, *Non-Human*, *Cry Baby*, *Slashers*, *Crazy Shuffle*, *Fuzz Power*, *Shooting Gallery*, *Lollipops*, *The Evil Empire*, *Sombreros*, *Storm Over the Desert (The Land War)*, *Mash-Man*, *They Came from Outer Space*, *Laser League*, *Billy-Bob*, *City of Doom*, *Bits and Pieces*, *Beeps and Bops*, *Manchester Beat*, *Boss*, *Dedant*, *Hambo's Adventures*, *Time Warp Tickers*, *Jigsaw*, *Ninja Assault*, *Robbie and the Robots*, and *The Action Gamester*.

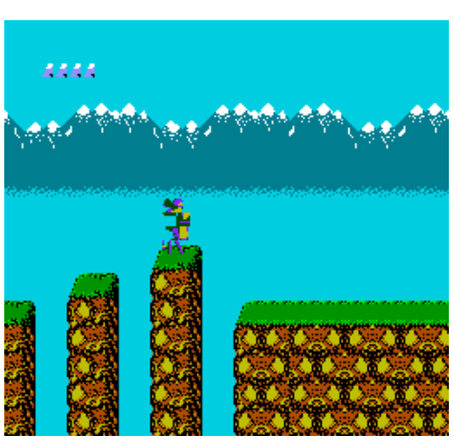
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

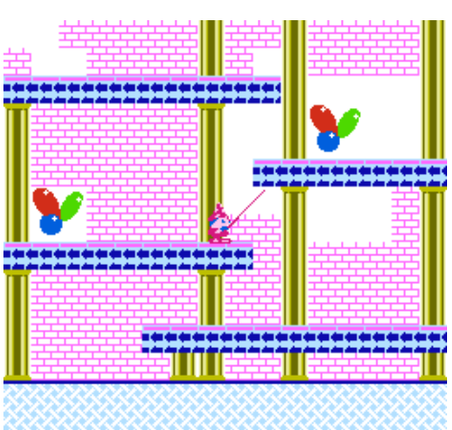
Notable Quotable:

"The game has a nice intro with hip-hop sampled music, speech synthesis, and a very excited Cheetahman . . .you'll be hard-pressed to find any of these 52 games worth playing. They range from pretty bad to very, very bad. Common issues across games include poor graphics and sound, terrible collision detection, and dull gameplay. Some games have specific problems, such as enemies that suddenly appear on top of you." —Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight: It was summer 1991, and my dad asked me if I minded feeding the cats for a family down the street where he had just put in a loft conversion for their house. I was persuaded by the offer of cash and commenced my duties the following week. I wasn't just going to feed the cats—I would need to have a good look around that mysterious house, especially as it was the biggest on our street, meaning they must have some cool stuff.

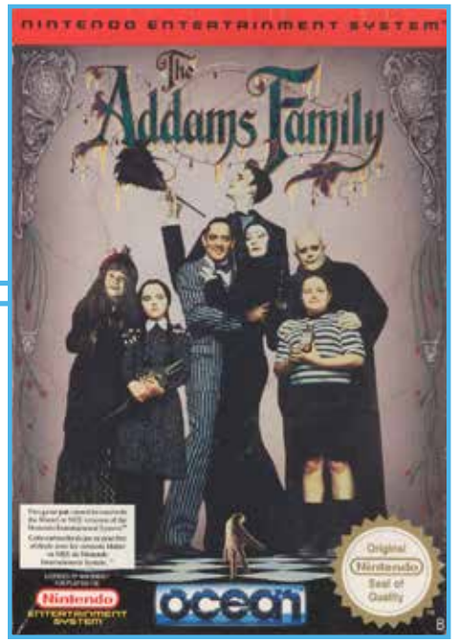
It wasn't long before I discovered that the kids that lived there had their own playroom, and hooked up to the TV in the corner was an NES surrounded by bean bag chairs. They only had a few games, including one that intrigued me: *Action 52*. I had never heard of the game, and after reading the description on the box my mind was boggled—52 different games on one cartridge? Surely that isn't possible! But it turns out that it definitely was, as within moments I was scrolling down a list of strangely named titles. I don't remember which one I picked first, or even any of the titles, but I do remember being utterly staggered by how awful they were! I played game after game thinking there must be at least one good one. Nope. They were all horrible, and I soon understood just how 52 games on one cartridge was possible. —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

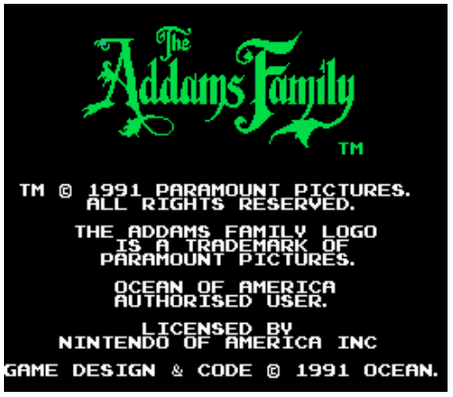




The Addams Family

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992





The creepy, kooky, altogether ooky Addams Family comes to the NES. Based on the 1991 feature film (which, in turn, was based on the 1960s television series and on the Charles Addams cartoon panels), the game stars many of the characters familiar to fans of the popular franchise, including Gomez, Mortic[illegible]ley, Wednesday, Lurch (who plays music), and Thing (who acts as a shield). Gomez must rescue members of his family from various rooms of his house and the surrounding grounds, avoiding skulls, ghosts, spikes, and other creatures and obstacles (many of which fall very quickly) along the way. Strangely, there are no weapons, but Gomez can jump on enemies, swim in a pond, paddle down a secret river, and collect money. Backed by a robust musical score, the game features atmospheric, richly illustrated areas to explore and plenty of tricky puzzles to solve, such as finding keys to open doors and using a potion to shrink Pugsley.

Memories: I grew up watching *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family*, but I always thought *The Addams Family* was cooler and funnier. Both could be a little silly, but the Addams clan were a bit edgier and more goth. Interestingly, while there were *Munsters* computer games, there never was a console video game based on the funny family that lived at 1313 Mockingbird Lane.

Notable Quotable:

"*The Addams Family* is the epitome of average, a side-scroller that doubles as a collect-a-thon . . . The game lacks any sort of logical order: why would your family be missing in the mansion? Why are the items of the mansion seeking to take your life? Where is Sully, that wormy guy from the first movie, who should be the main bad guy in this game?" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

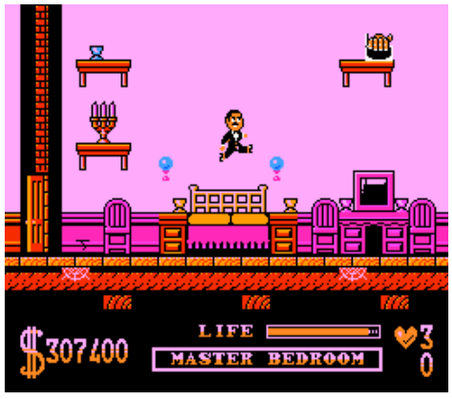
Notable Quotable:

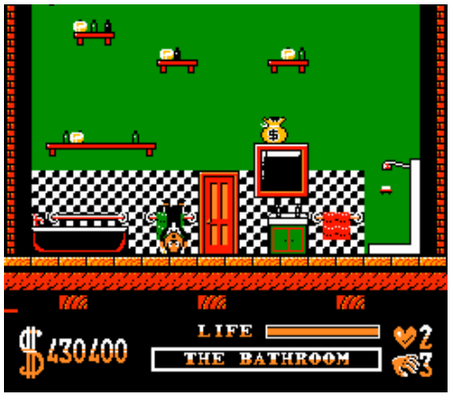
"Downright awful . . .I loved the movie as a kid . . . Unfortunately, this game doesn't do it justice . . .I couldn't beat this game . . .absolute frustration . . . Everything and anything hits you, and you RARELY get any health boosters . . .You're hit from all sides, and you have no weapons except for jumping on enemies . . .Some of the rooms were entertaining, but the difficulty and the utter annoyance of the enemies you encounter drive you absolutely insane." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

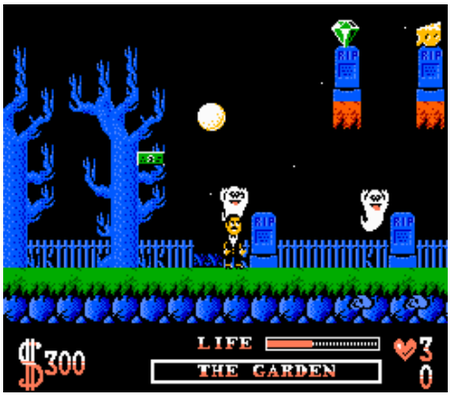
Notable Quotable:

"The house provides an excellent backdrop for a puzzle-oriented game . . . The puzzles are well laid out, and those that aren't spelled out by the family members are typically logical and easy to figure out . . .faulty sprite collision detection . . .extremely punishing level designs, most notably the roof . . . The graphics do a good job of evoking a similar atmosphere to the movie, providing creepy, colorful backdrops with bizarre, humorously designed enemies . . . Because of its open structure and item-puzzle oriented gameplay, *The Addams Family*'s style of play is reminiscent of *Metroid* or *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest*, but it unfortunately lacks the polish that makes those games so worthwhile." —NintendoComplete.Com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING







The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

Remember the Hanna Barbera cartoon series that ran from 1992 to 1995? *The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* is based on it. The game finds Pugsley, the chubby son of Morticia and Gomez Addams, searching for members of his family (Gomez, Granny, Wednesday, and Uncle Fester) who have been kidnapped and hidden as prisoners in their own home. Each family member holds a piece of music that Lurch must play to unlock the secret passage leading to Morticia, and Thing is on hand to provide clues. As with Gomez in *The Addams Family* for the NES, Pugsley has no weapons, but he can jump on the various creatures that impede his progress. Pugsley can also crouch, climb, swim, and fly (with the help of beanie caps). *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* is much different than the Super Nintendo game of the same name, where Pugsley searches for items his sister Wednesday has hidden around the Addams mansion. Oddly enough, it plays more like *The Addams Family* (NES, SNES), but with Pugsley assuming the protagonist role instead of his father.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

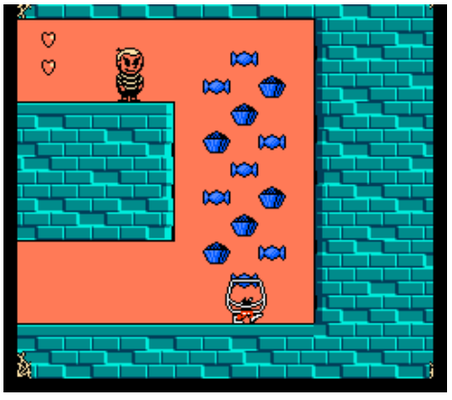
"There is no music, sound effects are simplistic, and there is little to speak of in the way of backgrounds . . .all areas are flat and lifeless looking . . .The controls handle fine, but areas of the mansion aren't particularly fun to look at or navigate, as there aren't many well-crafted platforming segments. While the freedom to explore is nice, the game itself becomes boring quickly and isn't something many will return to once they've discovered the secrets and quickest ways to complete the objectives." —Ian Ferguson (2016, *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985–1995)*)

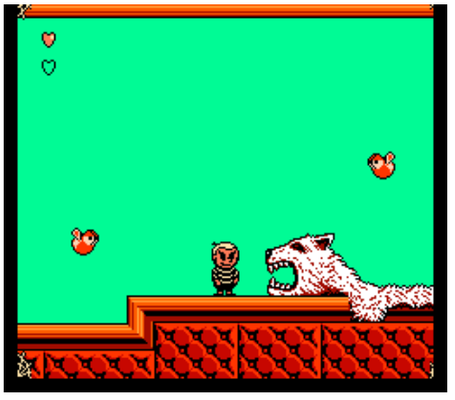
Notable Quotable:

"Colorful graphics can't save Pugsley, who's done in by average sounds and monotonous gameplay." —*GamePro* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

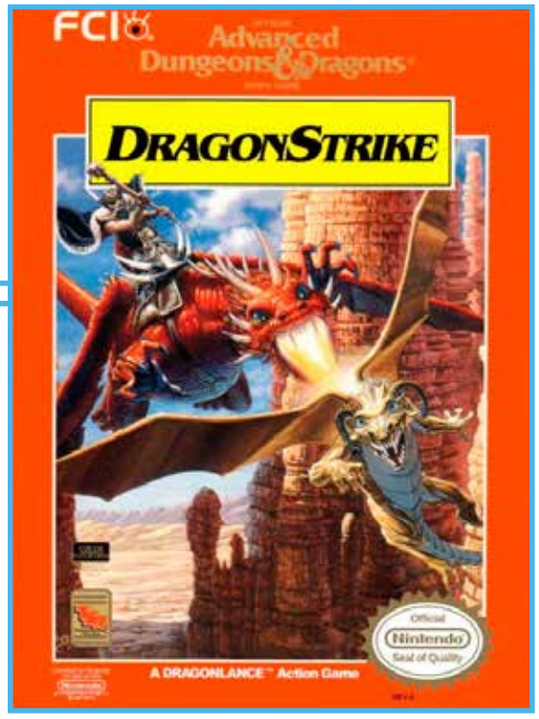
"It takes the gameplay from the first *Addams Family* game—collect things, avoid enemies, find the family—and makes them worse. You play as Pugsley, who bears a strong resemblance to a demon-possessed Bobby Hill. At first I thought the game was Ocean's idea of what it means to be avant-garde on the NES; the controls are broken, the environments are bare, and there is literally no music. An analogy on the barrenness of one's spiritual self? Amusing, but unlikely. A hastily thrown together piece of crap to capitalize on the successful rejuvenation of *The Addams Family*? Now we're talkin'! *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* was released in 1993, a time when Sonic was king, *Street Fighter II* and its imitators roamed the earth, and the original NES had one foot and a torso in the grave. Ocean knew this game had no chance, so why bother putting any effort into its creation? Once I came to that conclusion I ceased caring and turned it off."—Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)





Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: DragonStrike

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Westwood Associates
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



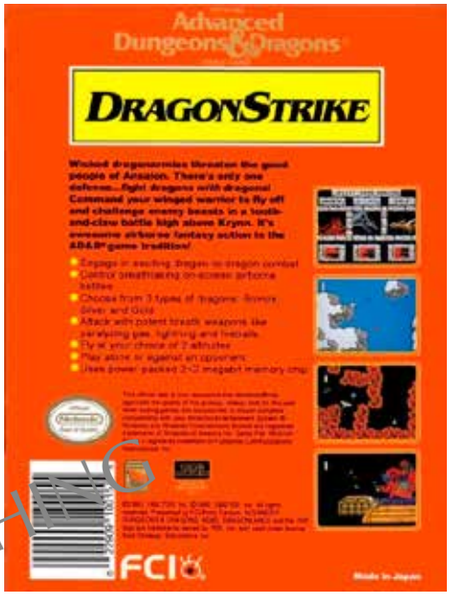
Veering clear of the first-person elements of the original computer version of the game, which was essentially a 3-D flight sim with dragons instead of planes, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: DragonStrike* for the NES opts instead for free-roaming shooter action. You guide one of three different dragons through 14 missions, shooting at such enemies as archers, battleships, carpet mages, giant dragonflies, and swamp monsters. You'll also battle bosses. The bronze dragon shoots lightning and repulsion gas, the silver dragon fires a cone of cold and paralyzing gas, and the gold dragon shoots a cone of fire and chlorine gas. Each is rated differently according to speed, armor class, and breath weapons. Your dragon, which you view from overhead, can fly high to destroy airborne enemies and low to shoot at ground enemies. Flying higher and lower also lets you avoid such obstacles as buildings, trees, and walls. Role-playing game elements are conspicuously absent but there are power-ups to grab, including speed, health, and armor.

Notable Quotable:

"It's from an RPG company, the name sounds like it should be an RPG, but it isn't. Of all things it is a shooter, and not a bad one at that. While the graphics could be better, the gameplay is okay. I like the overhead view, and the choice of three different dragons, each with different abilities, is all right. Good but not exceptional." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1992)

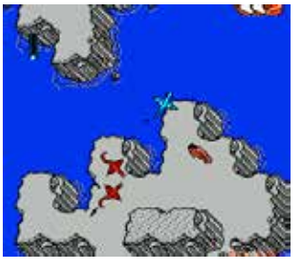
Notable Quotable:

"It's pretty cool to fly around from an overhead, 2-D perspective and blast the baddies, if a little repetitive . . . The graphics are fairly advanced for an NES game. The two heights you fly through are also a cool addition to the gameplay. The controls are smooth once you get used to them. Basically you're always in motion, flying in the direction your scaly snout is pointing. You press left or right to turn in a circle, so the up and down arrows switch your height . . . The music isn't bad . . . There could have been more distinction among the dragons; something like wider or faster attacks comes to mind . . .a two-player co-op or versus mode should have been added . . .a great game." —Aaron Dennis (vocal.media/gamers/dragon-strike-for-the-nes)



Notable Quotable:

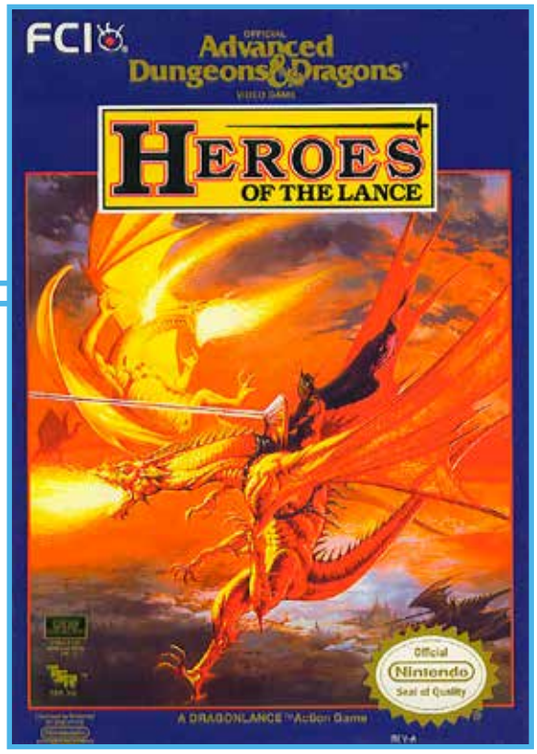
"You fly around, you shoot stuff, that's about it. The dragon controls like a computer game. He can fly around anywhere on the screen, but his movement feels like it should be controlled by a mouse, not a chunky d-pad. Sometimes when you shoot projectiles at ships, people, other dragons, your attack hits them; other times, what projectiles? For reasons unknown, the dragon begins the game with a partially-filled life bar, and it only takes a couple bullets or Neanderthal-heaved rocks, or an over-sized rock wall to take you down completely. Never mind that you're a dragon. Playing on the Easy setting helps quite a bit. Your health doesn't go down as quickly, and enemies don't take as long to shoot. It actually makes DragonStrike, dare I say, entertaining for a brief period of time. If Gary Gygax were to appear in a dream, roll a die, and command you to play just one of the Dungeons & Dragons games for the NES, make it DragonStrike." – Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes of the Lance

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Natsume
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes of the Lance is based on the 1988 computer game of the same name, the first *Dragonlance* campaign module (*Dragons of [illegible]r*), and *Dragons of Autumn's Twilight*, the *Dragonlance* novel written by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman. You, controlling one character at a time, guide a band of eight warriors and magic users of varying attributes and skills on a short adventure quest to find the Disks of Mishakal within the underground ruins of Xak Tsaroth. You'll battle giant spiders, Gully Dwarves, ferocious dragons (including the black dragon Khisanth), monstrous Draconians, evil dwarves, wraiths, and other enemies while avoiding such dangers as bottomless pits, crumbling ceilings, and magical traps. Battles, which include magic, melee, and ranged combat, are in real time, and the game sports a side-view perspective. In the September 1997 issue of *Nintendo Power*, *Heroes of the Lance* was listed as one of the "10 Worst Games of All Time."

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

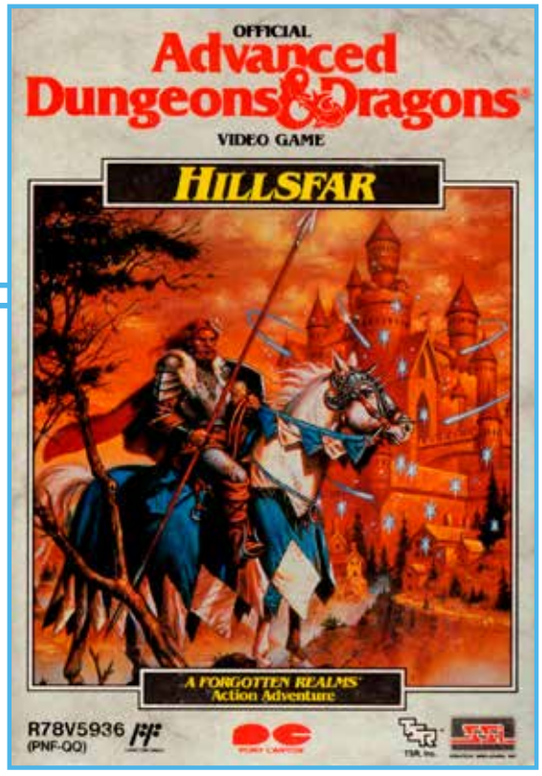
Notable Quotable:

"A wretched arcade maze game that's presented in the form of horizontally scrolling hallways rather than the proper first-person dungeon . . .the visuals are terrible and the music repetitive in the extreme, but such things are barely worthy of mention when the actual gameplay is more slovenly than a goblin tribe at the royal ball . . .the leader is the only one who appears on the screen and actually does anything . . .excepting of course his invisible companions' remarkable ability to take damage in battle without inflicting any of their own in turn . . . Jumping is incredibly awkward . . . This is a bad game—this is a terrible game—but it's also playable, and that's enough to make it a step up from a lot of other crap on the NES. It's certainly a considerable improvement over the one on the Master System." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight: I was a HUGE fan of the *Dragonlance* book series in junior high school. It was my favorite book series until I read *Game of Thrones*, so *Dragonlance* will always hold a special place in my heart. Shortly after I read the first two series of books an upperclassman told me, much to my excitement, that there was a game on the NES based on part of the first book. My excitement only grew when he said that he not only owned a copy of the game, but that he would let me borrow it. He did warn me that the game was horrible and that I would probably hate it. I didn't care—I needed to play it! The game started out promising enough, with 8-bit renderings of all of my favorite characters and some decent music. However, once the game started, yeah—it wasn't very good. Despite the weird running mechanics, hard-to-navigate menus, and unfair combat system, I still played it until I finished it. In fact, I put enough time into the game that I figured out exactly where I needed to go to be able to beat it in about 15–20 minutes. It's not a great game, but if you're a fan of the books like I am you should add it to your collection. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Hillsfar

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: SSI/Westwood Associates/Marionette
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



In *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Hillsfar*, which is an oddly segmented, [illegible]-deprived RPG, you explore around Hillsfar using a character that you create. Your character is ranked according to strength, intelligence, dexterity, and other attributes that can be built up as you journey through the game. Character classes include fighter, mage, thief, and cleric. During your journey you'll search secret rooms, fight in an arena, stun guards, locate exits, loot gold chests, avoid traps, raid houses for treasure, blast obstacles with a rod, compete in archery contests, jump over obstacles while riding a horse, gather information in taverns, and more. Based on the 1989 computer game of the same name.

Notable Quotable:

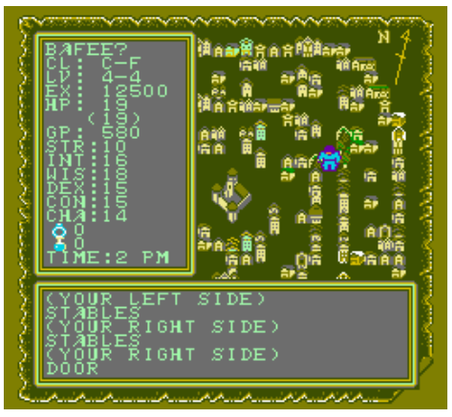
"More a collection of mini-games than a cohesive RPG . . . Lacking a storyline or plot, there isn't much to do in *Hillsfar* besides gain wealth and build up your character's stats." —Skyler Miller (formerly at www.allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

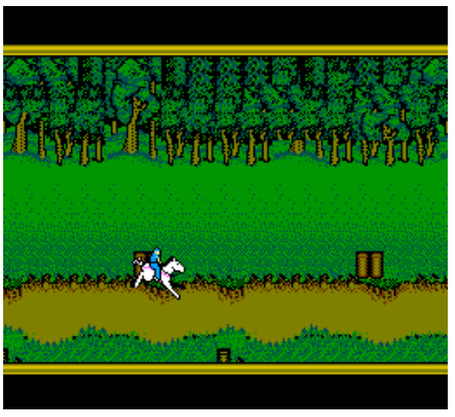
"It's beginning to look like there is no saving the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* games for the NES. Just when I thought it couldn't get much worse with *Heroes of the Lance* in comes *Hillsfar*. At least with *Heroes of the Lance* I had some sense of what I was meant to do. With *Hillsfar*, you're thrown into a giant city and just left to your own devices . . . For the most part this game consists of you either breaking into a house trying to steal treasures, wandering around a maze or dungeon, or riding on your horse to a dull location that's even worse than *Hillsfar*." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Inane and repetitive in the extreme . . .you're thrust into an ugly overhead labyrinth consisting of little more than walls, the floor, a nasty time limit, and your poorly rendered character sprite. These dungeons are also huge, while the playing area doesn't take up even half of the screen, resulting in a ludicrous amount of scrolling as you senselessly blunder into walls, traps, and the unusually crimson arms of the law . . .every location on the map manages to look and feel exactly the same—which is to say excruciating . . .raises the question as to who switched your NES with an Atari 5200 thanks to visuals that stand out as a stunning example of blah . . . nearly everything takes place in abject silence, although when you hear the music it *does* have, you'll likely agree that this isn't such a terrible thing." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)



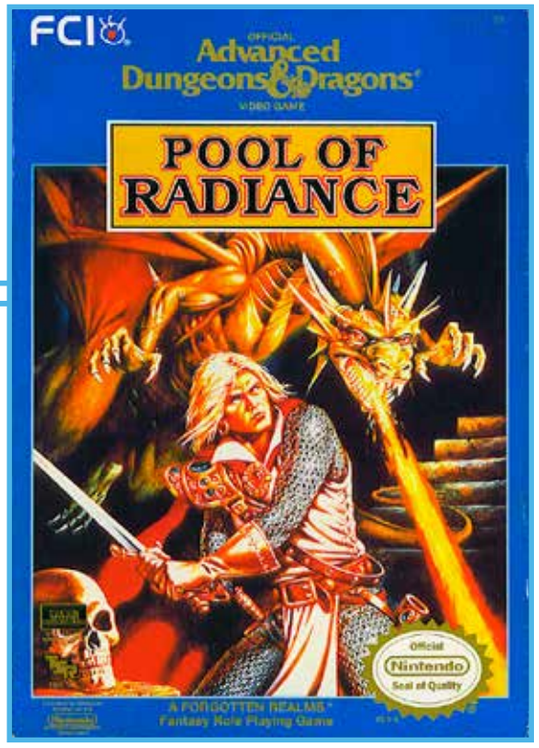
HURRY UP AND TRY TO OPEN THE LOCK!
DO NOT TRY TO OPEN THIS LOCK
USE PHYSICAL STRENGTH
PICK THE LOCK WITH AN OBJECT
USE A KNOCK RING TO OPEN
USE THE MAGICAL CHIME



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Pool of Radiance

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Marionette
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Remember the classic "Gold Box" games on the PC? *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Pool of Radiance* is a port of those titles, and a pretty decent one at that. Like the computer game, it does an excellent job of maintaining the spirit and gameplay of the popular pen-and-paper game *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. The action, which features an abundance of text dialog, lets players create a party of up to six characters of differing races and classes. The characters are modeled after those found in actual *D&D* rules sets, and the battles, which display an isometric viewpoint, evoke those found in the *AD&D* edition of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* book. In addition, the areas to explore (from a first-person perspective) are lifted from the *Forgotten Realms* campaign world. If you want to play real *D&D* but don't have a team of human adventurers to go along with you, you could do much worse than this one-player substitute, which, according to the back of the box, has more than 200 hours of gameplay.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"The overhead perspective, experience points, mysteries, clues, and gameplay are solid." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1992)

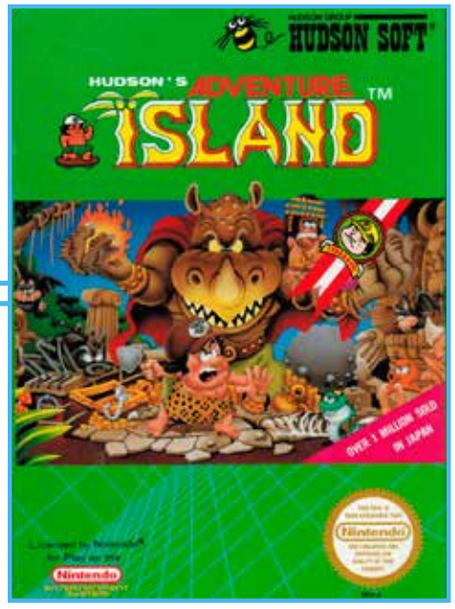
Notable Quotable:
"Gameplay is sluggish . . . The music and sound effects are repetitive and uninspired . . . The graphics and sound are pretty weak. The manual reads like the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and is harder to understand than calculus." —*GamePro* (June 1992)

Insider Insight: I had longed to own a copy of *Pool of Radiance* since it was released—it was the first official *AD&D* computer game that actually seemed to use the rich and involved rules to create a fantasy world with depth and elaborate battles. I looked at ads in magazines and salivated over what was surely the grandest of adventures. Alas, my family didn't own any of the computers it was released for, so I was out of luck until I saw the familiar cover art grace an NES game box years after the computer game had been surpassed with even more elaborate entries in the series. Better late than never, I figured.

Although I've heard many complaints about the NES version, I have to say I did enjoy it. It may not fit the mold of the typical NES cart—the graphics are plain, there is a lot of text, the music is minimal, the instructions are a must-read, and a little patience goes a long way—but with some imagination (a requirement for any *D&D* player) this really is great fun. Apparently some features were dropped from the computer version, but I didn't miss them since I'd never played it—ignorance is bliss. —Matt Daley, co-host of the Atari 5200 Super Community podcast

Adventure Island

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



Like all games of its type, *Adventure Island* owes a debt to the mother of all side-scrolling platformers, *Super Mario Bros.* To rescue a princess in this game, you guide a fellow named Master Higgins through bright, colorful, nicely illustrated forests, mountains, and caves. You'll grab eggs that turn into skateboards (for going faster), axes (for throwing at cobras, lizards, coyotes, bosses, and other enemies), fruit (for energy), and other useful items, including "honeygirls" that give you invincibility. Naturally, there are obstacles to jump over, such as rocks and snails, and missing a cloud jump results in instant death. As in *Super Mario Bros.*, *Adventure Island* is divided into eight worlds, each containing four stages. This is essentially the same game as *Wonder Boy* for the Sega Master System, but with a number of graphical changes, as an unusual licensing agreement let Hudson Soft use the same game engine as *Adventure Island* but not the same characters. If you like platforming in the classic 2D style you should enjoy this game.

Notable Quotable:

"The TG-16 installment, *New Adventure Island*, is a much better version to track down, as its upgrades in visuals and sound justify the purchase. Why? Because gameplay-wise the two titles are essentially the same. We'd recommend going that route rather than investing in this NES edition." —Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A terrific game that requires a good eye and quick hand. The enemies are ingeniously situated for maximum annoyance! Our only complaint: the screens and foes become redundant after a while. As Master Higgins forges ahead he simply moves through more crowded areas he's traversed before. Still, you'll be too busy leaping, shooting, and dodging to complain." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"*Adventure Island* plays rather well considering it was originally released in 1986 (in Japan). The controls are solid, although having to hold the run button to jump high even when standing still takes some getting used to . . . Like a lot of early NES games, the fun gameplay and original concept of *Adventure Island* is let down by the difficulty of the title. A single hit will kill you stone dead, and you start off with only three lives. The game utilizes a checkpoint system so you don't have to restart from the beginning of the level, but this only makes things fractionally easier . . . After a while you'll notice that a lot of levels are just repeats of earlier ones but with a higher difficulty level. The boss fights at the end of every fourth level are also very similar to each other. These aren't necessarily bad things (*Super Mario Bros.* also repeated levels and bosses), but may frustrate gamers who like to feel a proper sense of progress." —Rolan O'Lorcain (www.defunctgames.com)

Insider Insight: One day in fifth grade, my friend Zev came over after school, where I proudly showed him my new Nintendo game, *Adventure Island*. (Or as I called it, "Hudson's Adventure Island," based on the box art's title graphic.) I had already conquered the first few levels at home and couldn't wait to show him this brand new, *Super Mario*-style side scroller.

To my utter surprise, the moment we started playing it his eyes lit up with recognition. This game wasn't new, he told me—he had played it many times before. And its name was *Wonder Boy*. Not true, I exclaimed—its name was *Hudson's Adventure Island*, and I showed him the cartridge to prove my point.

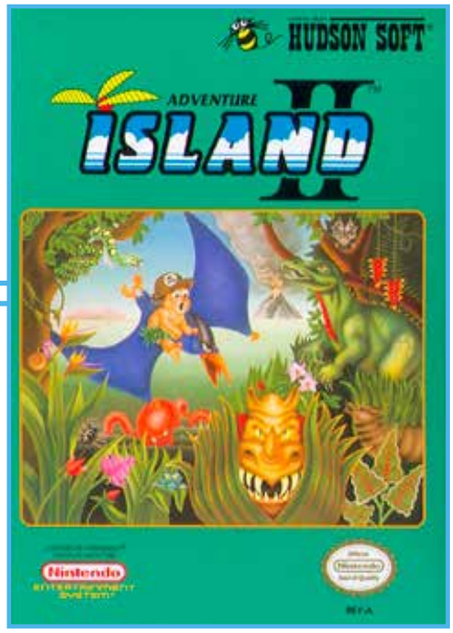
But he kept insisting that the game was really *Wonder Boy*, and that he had played it on the Sega. He happened to be about the only person I knew who owned a Sega Master System rather than an NES, so I couldn't further argue the point, and we essentially just agreed to disagree. And moments later we had so much fun playing the game that the conversation was effectively forgotten.

With the advent of the internet I learned that he and I were both correct. *Adventure Island* on the NES is a direct port of *Wonder Boy* on the Sega, just with a new title and minor gameplay differences. Zev's family moved to Boston later that year and he and I subsequently lost touch. Amazingly enough though, we reconnected in 2018 through his brother, who had moved back to Dallas, where I live. Within a few moments our conversation turned back to, "Remember when we argued over the name of *Wonder Boy* and *Adventure Island*?" Indeed he recalled it as well, and at that moment I knew our friendship had truly rekindled! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Adventure Island II

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Now Production
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Master Higgins returns in *Adventure Island II*, which improves upon the already enjoyable *Adventure Island* by giving the titular, axe-wielding young man four friendly dinosaurs to ride, each of which can perform a fun-to-use, nicely animated skill. Blue Quintosaurus whips with his tale, while Red [illegible]osaurus spits fire. Elasmosaurus s[illegible] while Pteranodon flies. The game also has sharper graphics than its predecessor and a special map screen. One hit will kill Higgins unless he has a power-up, such as a weapon or a skateboard (which makes him faster). Good music, diverse (if typical) environments (caves, forests, deserts, and the like), different bosses, fun enemies (octopuses, giant scorpions, king cobras, and the like), the ability to crack open eggs to acquire useful items, and challenging gameplay only add to the fun. Interestingly, *Adventure Island II*, which is an offshoot of the Sega Master System's *Wonder Boy* series, stays faithful to the basic elements of the original *Wonder Boy* formula while the Master System sequels, *Wonder Boy in Monster Land* and *Wonder Boy III*, introduce swordplay and role-playing game elements.

Notable Quotable:

"*Adventure Island* was a completely excellent multi-round action/adventure, and the sequel not only lives up to this high level of quality, it actually surpasses it. *Adventure II* throws in all types of new objects to interact with, expanding the scope of the first game and delivering plenty of fun!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"A deceptively simple-looking game. Some of the enemies are extremely well-protected—either by obstacles or by the way the enemy moves. You'll only be able to get past by discovering the throwing and jumping technique that works. Coordination is much more important than strategy." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay overhaul turned out well enough, but they could have done more with the graphics. This could very easily pass for the first game as they share an almost identical look . . .the bosses of each island are unique and actually put up a fight . . .a solid platformer that corrects all of the flaws of its predecessor and introduces elements that would go on to further define the series." —RetroGameAge (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Excellent sequel . . . The visual style is slightly different because everything now has black outlines, making objects look better defined . . . What really elevates *Adventure Island II* is your ability to ride on dinosaurs . . .these creatures make the game a lot easier . . .jumping is easier because you no longer need a running start to leap high . . .an entertaining romp. It retains the arcade simplicity of the first game while incorporating many worthwhile new features." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

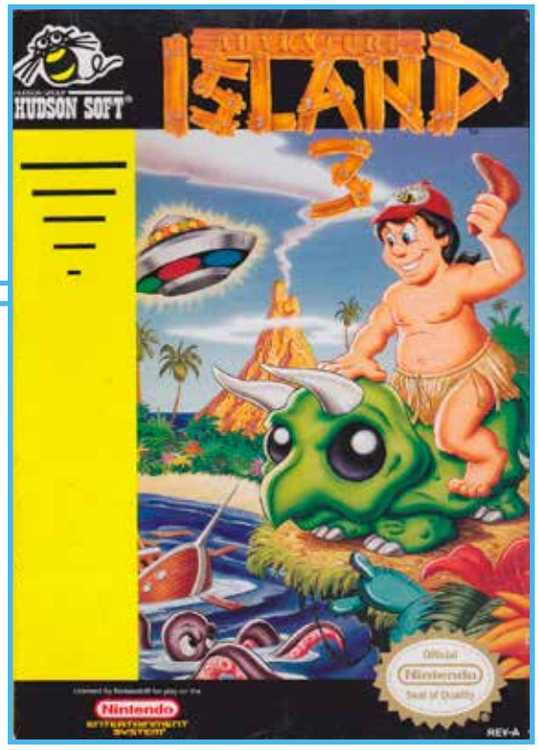
Notable Quotable:

"The controls are responsive and quick . . . Each dinosaur has a unique feel and actually improves the controls in certain situations. For instance, if you are running on ice with the blue dinosaur you don't slide! Graphics are fantastic and crisp in each of the levels, though I definitely disliked the cave levels the most as they all looked the same. Master Higgins' sprite looks good . . .cool-looking bosses . . . Sound is also superb . . . an A+ platform game . . .fun, challenging, and exciting with nice tension between exploration and progression." —Retrogame Man (retrogameman.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Adventure Island 3

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Now Production
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Despite the lack of a Roman numeral on the box, *Adventure Island 3* is similar to *Adventure Island II* (a good thing), but includes a fifth dinosaur pal, Poley Tripetaurus, who can perform a rolling attack. Other new additions include a boomerang Master Higgins throws that loops around before returning and a crystal that gives him temporary invincibility. To rescue Jeannie Jungle, who has been kidnapped by aliens, you as Higgins must explore eight islands, each of which is filled with creatures to battle (birds, snakes, snails, skulls, and the like), fruit to eat, and eggs you can crack open to grab milk bottles (for maintaining energy), axes, time stops, and other useful weapons and items. The inventory screen returns, letting you store extra hatchets and helper animals for future use. There are keys for opening portals to bonus rounds and secret rooms, and once again you can ride a skateboard to go faster.

Notable Quotable:

"Playing the latest NES *Adventure Island* game is like watching a new episode of *Gilligan's Island*. You've never seen it before, but it still seems like a rerun. *Adventure Island 3* is another massive, ultra challenging, island hopping addition to a classic series, but the game's structure and presentation are nearly identical to its forefathers'. The action's solid, but it's repetitive and familiar side-scrolling fare. The graphics and sounds are a grade or two below top-of-the-line NES games, such as *Super Mario Bros. 3*." —*GamePro* (August 1992)

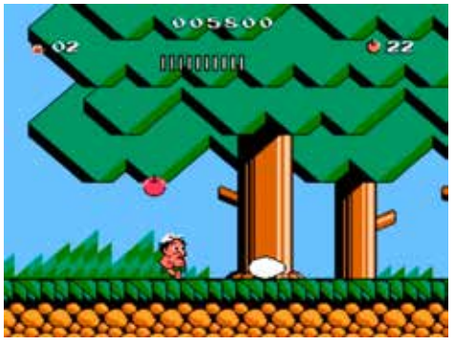
Notable Quotable:

"*Adventure Island II* was chock full of surprises, but this third edition seems to have hit the creative wall. The premise is the same, as you guide a chubby dude through a prehistoric world, commandeering dinosaurs as you go . . .the developers tried to give the graphics a next-generation 3-D look. The scenery is certainly more angular, but the illusion of depth is not convincing . . . I prefer the graphics of the previous games . . . *Adventure Island 3* feels more like a 'greatest hits' compilation than a brand-new adventure. Most of the enemies, level designs, and even music seem awfully familiar . . .there are some interesting new wrinkles . . . I still find the controls problematic at times . . .it's clear that the series couldn't go much farther on the NES. Still, there's a lot of engrossing platform action here." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

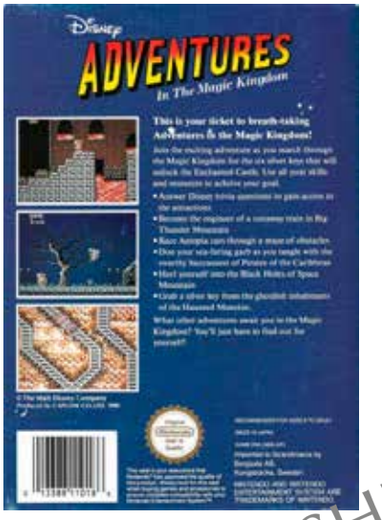
"After a solid second outing, *Adventure Island 3* came along and felt really unnecessary . . .a solid adventure, but one that feels more like a cash grab than a product with some heart behind it . . . Level themes are brought over wholesale to the point where if you were to make a quick glance you could very easily mistake this for the second game. The underwater levels in particular are so blatantly copied and pasted that Hudson should feel ashamed of themselves . . . The difficulty curve ramps up pretty quickly . . . By the time you reach the end of the second island fruit is noticeably less abundant. Combined with hazards such as rolling boulders and carefully placed moving platforms that require you to slow down, you'll experience quite a few close calls before making it to the exit . . . Boss battles on the other hand are exceedingly easy with simple patterns that offer little challenge." —RetroGameAge (www.retrogameage.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Adventures in the Magic Kingdom

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Want to go to Disney World, a.k.a. the "happiest place on earth," but lack the time or money? Enter *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom*, which has players collecting keys by completing five surprisingly challenging mini-games, each of which is based on a real Disney theme park attraction. Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted House are side-scrolling platformers in which players run, jump, and throw candles at enemies. Big Thunder Mountain is an overhead-view, downward-moving mine cart game containing such obstacles as dead ends, wrong-way crossing guards, and rolling boulders. Autopia is a top-down, vertically scrolling racer with jumps reminiscent of the coin-op classic *Bump 'n' Jump* (which was ported to the NES), while Space Mountain is a first-person space shooter with you at the helm of a ship. Disney fans of all ages will enjoy the atmosphere of the rides and many will have fun with the trivia questions that are posed, ranging from "What is the name of Mickey's dog?" to "Who portrayed the younger Hardy Boy?" Unfortunately, like so many NES games—even colorfully cartoonish ones—less experienced players may find the games to be prohibitively difficult.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

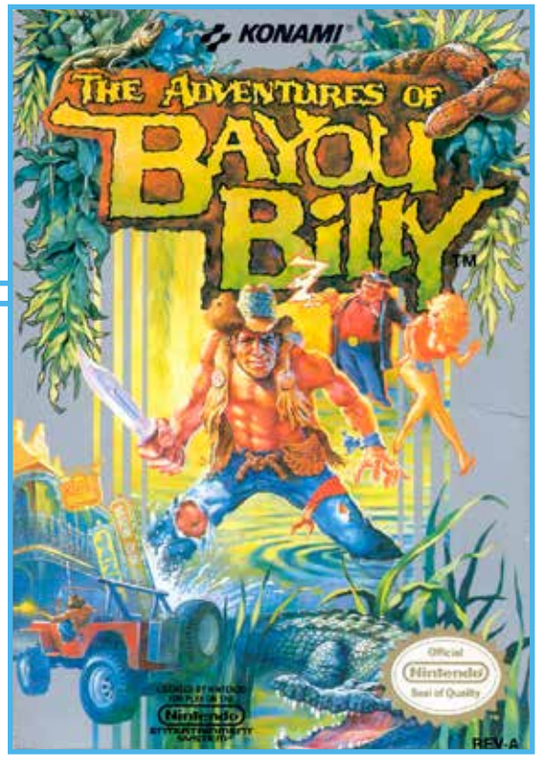
"A waste of a potentially wondrous idea . . .The Disney quiz is harmless and can be interesting so long as you don't get poor luck when it comes to questions, but most of the other attractions are pretty awful." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Notable Quotable:

"We didn't want to make it appear as though this was literally what the California Disneyland looked like, or that this was the extent of what was in the park, or that these sorts of activities might actually occur there. So we just blended some things together and gave the setting some slight interpretation . . . We wound up cutting the Jungle Cruise game altogether because it had screen after screen of some lavender-shaded tiling for jungle rock walls that bore absolutely no resemblance to the ride and didn't convey any sense of what it was really like . . .it was my idea to add the trivia to quickly and easily boost the presence of Disney in the game. It just took a few phone calls to obtain some official Disney trivia from one of the departments. It provided more than what I needed, so I picked a range of topics from various time periods. I wanted the little kids to have to either guess and learn or ask their parents . . . We wanted this game to be a little more difficult than *DuckTales* and *Rescue Rangers*. We expected it to draw a slightly older audience because it wasn't based around a children's cartoon or the cartoon characters." —Darlene Lacey (www.nintendoplayer.com), former Disney game producer

The Adventures of Bayou Billy

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Demolition/Combat Racing/Light Gun shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Boasting a soundtrack superior to most other NES titles, *The Adventures of Bayou Billy* is an atmospheric, richly illustrated game set in the Louisiana swamp lands. It is also graphically diverse, incorporating three entirely different genres. Five of the game's nine stages consist of *Double Dragon*-style fighting, with players, as a Crocodile Dundee-like hero, punching, kicking (including jump-kicks), knifing, whipping, and hitting (with a stick) a succession of bad guys and alligators. A pair of *Operation Wolf*-type first-person shooting stages lets gamers use a Zapper gun or a standard controller to pick off enemies that jump down from above and come in from the sides.

Finally, two driving stages, each featuring a behind-the-vehicle perspective, have players shooting bullets and throwing dynamite at planes, helicopters, and a swamp stomper. Inspiring a five-issue Archie comic book series of the same name, *The Adventures of Bayou Billy* was hyped pretty heavily upon release, with a TV commercial and ads in comic books. Unfortunately, it looks and sounds (voice effects are included) better than it plays. It's also very difficult to beat. One of Konami's lesser efforts in terms of sheer gameplay.

Notable Quotable:

"*The Adventures of Bayou Billy* has some of the best light gun action on the NES and fun driving elements, but some of the most dreadful beat-'em-up stages I've ever played. Unfortunately, these take up most of the game's length, and their sheer difficulty means that most people probably won't stick around to see what else it has to offer." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are wonderful. There is nice attention to detail and flawless animation. And I love the music and sound effects! They do a fine job of setting the tone for this rockin' and reelin' bayou fight game . . . The early stages (1 through 5) are difficult, but you'll be able to conquer them with practice. The real challenge is in getting to stage 6 and beyond with enough lives and continues remaining to make a difference . . .a splendid assortment of play modes." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

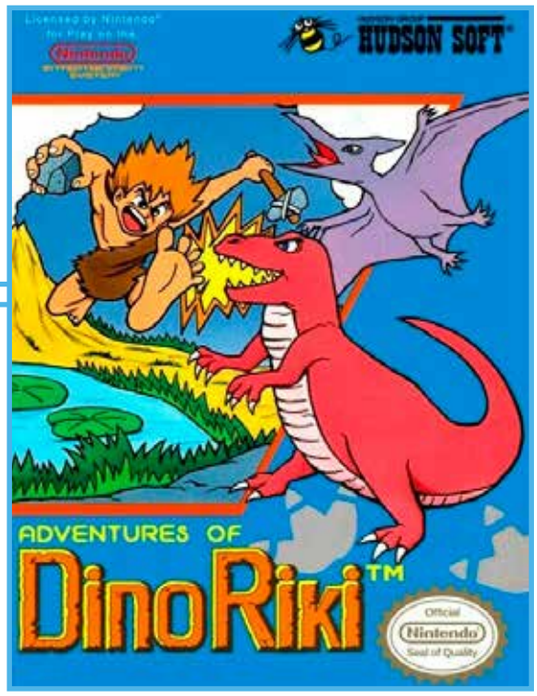
Notable Quotable:

"An interesting experiment in a multi-genre game . . .far too hard . . . In the beat-'em-up sections you generally wander forward, punching, kicking, or sometimes jump-kicking anybody who gets in your way. Unfortunately, that's more or less your entire move set, without so much as a throw to use. Lack of moves aside, actually fighting whatever enemies you come across generally leads to frustration. Enemies tend to attack too quickly . . .the shooting sections don't fare much better . . . The problem is that you've got a limited supply of ammo, and when it runs out, you die . . .a single touch from another car, or even one of the posts on the side of the road, will make your jeep go up like a Pinto, taking one of your precious lives. Given that you only get three lives to a credit, you might see how this could be a problem." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Adventures of Dino Riki

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter/Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



A playable game with smooth controls but difficult platforming, *Adventures of Dino Riki* is easy to learn, yet highly challenging. The prehistoric game puts you in the title role of a young man who walks, runs, jumps (over water and other obstacles), and [illegible] his way up five challenging (if graphically plain) stages of jungles, deserts, swamps, and quicksand. Armed with rocks, axes, boomerangs, and torches, Dino Riki must shoot dinosaurs, spitting dolphins, spitting cobras, dragons, flying cow skulls, flying fish, purple flies, and other enemies, including the following bosses: Pteranodon, Tyrannosaurus, Monster Fly, Triceratops, and Giant Cobra. Certain elements of the scenery are destructible such as flowers, pots, and skulls, revealing power-up icons when you destroy them. Power-ups Riki can grab include turbo boots for speed, power fists that upgrade your weaponry one level, Airy the bird that lets you take flight, and perhaps most impressively, Macho-Riki, which is a larger Riki who can throw mirror images of himself. He can also grab hearts for health, stars that destroy all onscreen enemies, and diamonds for points. An interesting mix of platforming and rapid-fire shooting.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"This game would have been a bit cooler if you were flying on a pterodactyl . . . Besides scenery and enemies, nothing is different from your typical shooter. Upgrade weapons, get bonus lives, and each stage gets progressively harder. And by hard, I mean insane . . .probably one of the hardest shooters I've played on the NES . . .from stage one you are overwhelmed. At times I wanted to cry." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

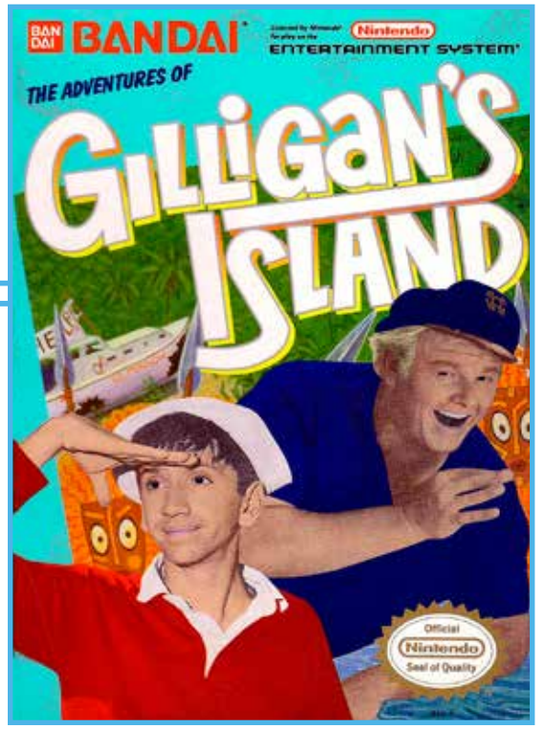
"Oozes charm throughout . . .great colorful graphics and a very catchy soundtrack. The gameplay and controls are also a treat, and the caveman is very responsive . . .well, that's as long as you don't have to jump on a platform . . . The first thing that hits you is how unbalanced the difficulty level is—there is no learning curve, and the first stage (and its frustrating nenuphar/lily pad jumps) will crush you without any remorse. That's it, 'platform jumping' is the most frustrating move in the whole game . . . Moving platforms don't carry you with them and you'll fall through them countless times . . .another rather unique and refreshing game idea stuck inside an unbalanced and really unfair game." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The palettes are not the most imaginative or diverse, but they are fairly bright and do cause the screen to pop . . . The music has that classic retro feel and represents the 8-bit musical genre very well. As you progress through the stages, the mood of the music gradually shifts from upbeat, to frantic, to dread-inducing. The boss music likewise invokes a slight feeling of panic . . .lack of a proper ending. While it stands to reason that a game without a real story probably wouldn't have a real ending, the player is simply whisked back to Stage 1 after defeating the final boss. Some players could accept this if there were at least something as simple as one congratulatory screen describing in short detail the aftermath of your victory. Alas this is not so. It is more reminiscent of *Arkista's Ring*; however, you do actually get an ending after playing through the game four times, with the difficulty increasing each playthrough." —Geeks Under Grace (www.geeksundergrace.com)

The Adventures of Gilligan's Island

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Human Entertainment
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

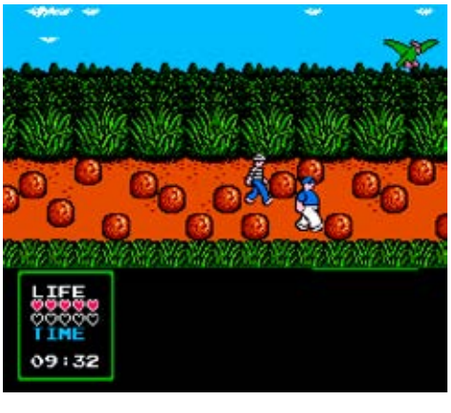


Gilligan's Island is based on the popular sitcom that ran on CBS for three seasons from 1964 to 1967. Unfortunately, it lacks the humor and goofy fun of the show. There are four different "episodes" in the game, each of which has you controlling Skipper, with Gilligan tagging along and talking to you via text. You'll wander around freely, performing a variety of dull tasks, including saving other crew members (rescuing Mary Ann from headhunters has never been more boring), talking to other characters, collecting materials to build a hut, gathering coconuts so Mary Ann can bake a pie, and searching for Mr. Howell's golf ball and pieces of a stone tablet. Swimming, punching wild animals (including a bear), and dodging rocks and trees can't rescue the game from sheer tedium. The top two-thirds of the screen depict the side-view action while the bottom section displays text, life hearts, and a mapping system. Gilligan and the gang are less detailed than your average 8-bit characters and the levels are unattractive, giving you scene after scene of trees and ground. Sadly, the best thing about the game is the opening song, which does a reasonably good job of mimicking the memorable theme music. Rabid fans of the show may want to add this game to their collection of memorabilia (the box looks cool) but gamers should avoid it. Lucky for Ginger she's not in the game.

Memories: As a kid I was a big *Gilligan's Island* fan and had a huge crush on Mary Ann. I watched a few episodes fairly recently after not watching it in decades. I thought it would be horrible. I found it silly, of course, but it was actually pretty funny. Another surprise: I think I'm on team Ginger now, as she's dead sexy viewed through adult eyes. As far as this game goes, I found a complete copy sometime in the late '90s, when I was new to eBay. I pestered my brother-in-law, who was the earliest eBay user I knew of, to sell it for me. He agreed to do so, but I ended up just starting my own eBay account and selling it myself. I don't recall the price realized for the game, but I must have been pleased, as I have been selling on eBay ever since—everything from comic books, to magazines, to video games, to toys.

Notable Quotable:

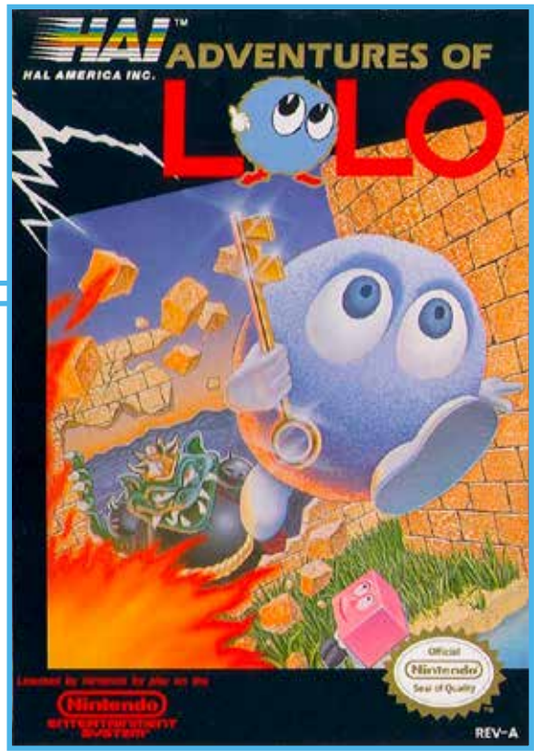
"A labyrinthine no-man's-land designed to drive hapless travelers insane . . .a game that is 96 percent about walking. Walking while listening to awful music and reading the occasional knee-slapping conversational gag fresh out of a 3rd grader's first joke book . . . All the while I'm desperately trying to keep the game's enemies from shaving hearts off of my bar. The other 4 percent of the time I'm fighting the worst boss characters ever devised." —Chris Kohler (www.wired.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Adventures of Lolo

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle/Maze, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



To rescue Princess Lala from Egger, a.k.a. the King of Darkness, you must guide a blue ball named Lolo around a series of top-down, non-scrolling mazes in the Great Tower of the Labyrinth, grabbing heart framers. When all the hearts have been taken a chest opens up to reveal a jewel, which Lolo must get to advance to the next level. Certain heart framers contain items for use in trapping or defeating the creatures that roam around each maze, shooting fire, dashing toward Lolo, or otherwise trying to destroy our hero. Enemy creatures include Skull, Medusa, Armadillo, and Rocky, among others. Heart framer items include bridges for crossing over lava, hammers for destroying rocks, ammo for turning monsters into eggs (which can be used to float across water), and more. Lolo can fire projectiles to stun or eliminate enemies and reverse an area's one-way direction. Each screen in *Adventures of Lolo* is a puzzle, making the game a brain-straining challenge in later levels. You'll definitely need the passwords for saving your progress through the game's 50 levels.

Notable Quotable:

"*Lolo* is an absolutely entrancing game! While it may not be high on shoot-em-up action, it does have gameplay that is addicting beyond belief! It is supported by some slick graphics, jazzy tunes, and is packed with surprises. *Lolo* may not be a hot arcade name—but it is great! A sleeper hit!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"If you're new to the game, you'll be spending hours at a time finding the solutions to the tougher puzzles, and this game will be incredibly addicting . . . Once all the puzzles are solved, though, the interest drops. This is a game you'll want to play, beat, leave alone for a few months (or however long it takes you to forget the solutions), and start playing again." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

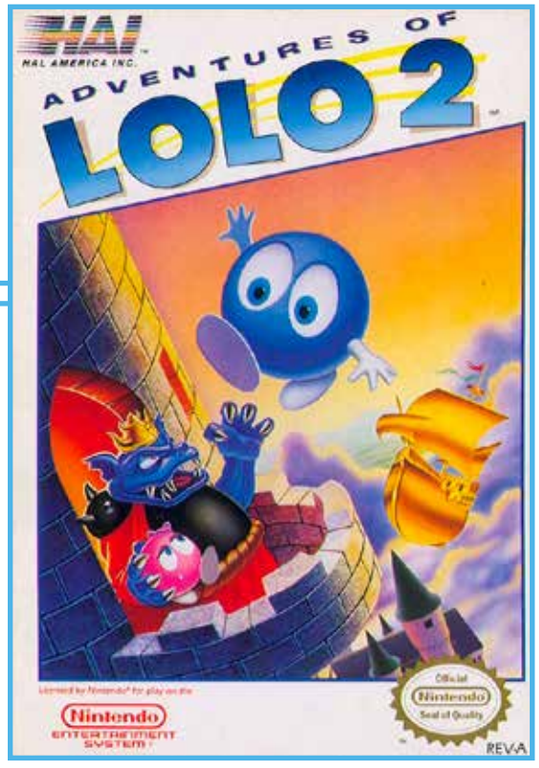
Notable Quotable:

"A classic puzzler that will make you scratch your head until your hair falls out . . .nothing feels more rewarding than mastering each challenge . . .looks fantastic. Lolo and all of his enemies are animated wonderfully as illustrated in the way that Lolo moves his entire body when he walks and pulls silly faces when he gets hurt . . .the enemies always seem alive as they turn their heads and watch you walk by. The rooms appear detailed, although each one basically looks the same. Sure, you'll be presented with different layouts, objects, and enemies, but the brick walls and floors never change. The music consists of one song that plays throughout and, although it's catchy, it becomes repetitive rather quickly. Sound effects as you use abilities, collect items, and clear rooms are satisfying, but you'll probably prefer to play on mute after a while . . .There are only fifty rooms to master, and once you're done, that's all there is to do. This may take you quite a while depending on your critical thinking skills, but it's still rather short." —A. J. Maciejewski (videochums.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Adventures of Lolo 2

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle/Maze, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Comprised of 50 maze puzzle screens, *Adventures of Lolo 2* is very similar to the original *Adventures of Lolo*, despite visually improved graphics and a somewhat higher level of difficulty (once again, those passwords will come in handy). You guide Lolo around a series of top-down, non-scrolling mazes, grabbing all the heart framers to open a treasure chest to exit to the next level. Each maze is riddled with such items as trees, flower beds, deserts, rocks, and creatures. Lolo slides boxes, traps creatures, fires magic shots to turn enemies into eggs, builds bridges to cross lava, uses hammers to crush rocks, and more. All the enemies from the first game return, including Snakey, Leeper, Medusa, Gol, Rocky, and Alma, but the puzzles, though familiar in design, are new. Also new are bosses, which you can defeat by firing a magical egg shot. Once again, your goal is to rescue Princess Lala, who was kidnapped and is trapped in a high tower. For you super old-school gamers, the action is vaguely similar to *Pengo* (arcade, Atari 5200), but with much more of an emphasis on puzzle solving.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"This game is extremely similar to the first *Lolo* title, but a few additions have been made to the theme to make it play slightly different. To me *Lolo* never achieved the recognition it deserved, and this second entry should provide players with a second chance to experience a truly fine game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"*Adventures of Lolo 2* is so similar to its predecessor that upon quick examination, it's difficult to differentiate the two. The graphics have been improved, so some of the monsters look slightly better, and the emerald boxes Lolo pushes now sparkle with a glassy sheen. While the first game ended in a rather anticlimactic cut scene of Lolo defeating the Great Devil, in this installment the player gets an opportunity to fight him." —Zachary Knowlton (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

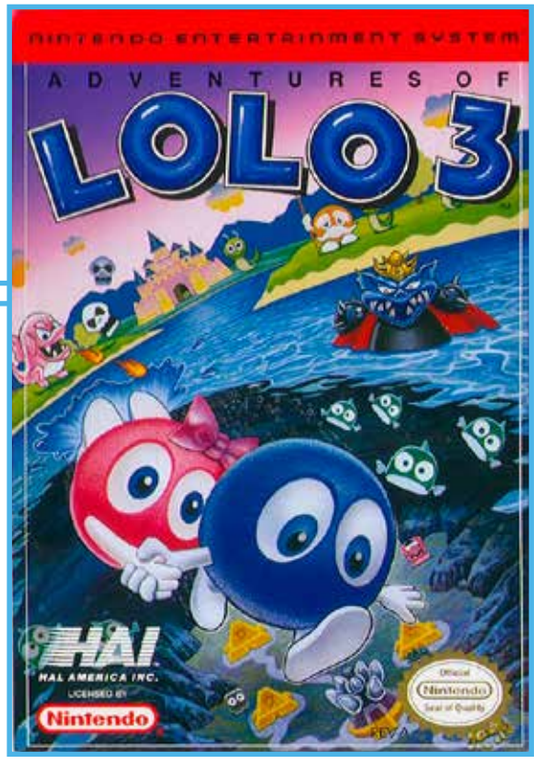
"If this game had come out now, people would complain and say it should just be DLC, which is really what it is. Frankly, I don't care though. The puzzles are unique enough that it doesn't matter how well you did in the first game. Some puzzles are downright impossible! They even brought some classic puzzles back from the first game and turned up the difficulty dial . . . Some people might be turned off by the fact that it's practically a remake of the first game, but it still holds its own." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This game's more of an expansion than a sequel, really—there are no new gameplay mechanics at all. The only changes are slightly different graphics for a few monsters, new (obviously!) and harder puzzles, and the fact that the game has an actual boss battle at the end this time . . . Professional players can enter the passwords PROA, PROB, PROC, and PROD to access four 'Pro' levels. If you thought you were great at solving puzzles these four will make you rethink that!" —Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com)

Adventures of Lolo 3

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle/Maze, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



If the first two games in this top-down, maze-puzzler series were a bit frustrating for you, you'll appreciate the new Gran[illegible]earning Tree feature, where an old m[illegible]s you how to solve specific puzzles. The game also introduces underwater levels, a rainbow egg and key (for accessing level three), and a main map that lets you finish levels in the order you choose. Certain locations remain blocked until you find a key after completing a different level. Plus, you can play as either Lolo or his girlfriend, Lala, switching between them as desired. They play the same, but I like the girl power sentiment, as Lala was merely a kidnapping victim in the first two games. There are also new enemies. Otherwise *Adventures of Lolo 3* offers much the same type of action: collect heart containers, move blocks, and use egg shots to turn enemies into eggs that can block other creatures, make a raft, and more. Passwords are available again, but now you've also got infinite lives. If you enjoy such maze titles as *Ms. Pac-Man* and *Trog!* but want more puzzle elements give the *Adventures of Lolo* series a try.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"Hal America's third adventure featuring Lolo and Lala is the biggest and best yet, with 17 levels and 100 mind-boggling rooms." —*Nintendo Power* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"*Lolo 3* is pretty good for the third in the series. Puzzle games aren't my thing, but this one is very involving and fun to play. It's kind of like *Boxxle*, but the puzzles have more variety. The only drawback is that once you beat all the levels you don't want to play it anymore." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1991)

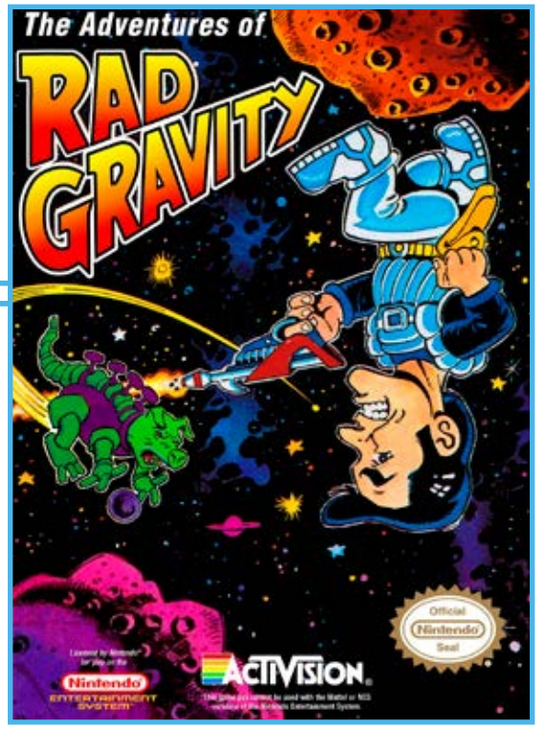
Notable Quotable:
"*Adventures of Lolo 3* retains the core elements of the original *Lolo* games while offering a number of improved features. Training stages eliminate much of the frustration felt by beginners by providing an easy demonstration of the tricks and techniques necessary to complete levels . . . Even with these changes *Lolo 3* is essentially the same game as the original." —Zachary Knowlton (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"It never ceases to amaze me that the people at Hal American can keep coming up with puzzles . . . They're just as hard and require as much experimentation and creative problem solving as those of the first two games. If you pride yourself as much on your ability to think as you do your finesse with a joystick, *Adventures of Lolo 3* will be a real treat for you." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The slogan for the *Adventures of Lolo* series should be, 'The family that plays together stays together in the house for six months until the neighbors have to call the police to get them out.' As in previous games in this series, the challenge is to navigate Lolo (or, for the first time, his mate, Lala) through a sequence of rooms filled with pesky, strategically placed enemies and movable blocks. Still, though the game has action adventure elements, the focus is on problem solving—it can take days to figure out how to clear a single room." —*Entertainment Weekly* (July 1991)

The Adventures of Rad Gravity

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



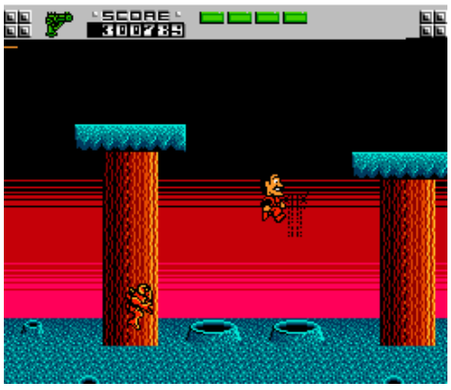
The Adventures of Rad Gravity is a fun, variety-packed platformer with nice production values. You, as the big-headed protagonist (who bears an odd resemblance to Bruce Campbell), goes adventuring on nine different planets and an asteroid belt. He uses weapons picked up along the way—a laser sword, super sword, power pistol, vertigun, maxigun, and crystal bombs—to battle an assortment of aliens and creatures. Other useful items include: four types of armor; a teleporter; a translator (for deciphering alien text); and an energy disk (for floating over hazardous areas). The planets are all different in their environments, and enemies and additional planets are unlocked by finding the location codes at computer terminals on certain planets. Activities on the planets are varied and include: jumping over obstacles (Rad jumps higher in low-gravity worlds); riding elevators; shutting down a security system; opening doors to secret areas; stopping a conveyor belt; finding a gravity device; solving puzzles (some more obtuse than others); running around upside down; and much more. The game is lengthy and challenging (dodging alien projectiles can be tough, and there are some cheap hits), meaning passwords for saving progress are a virtual necessity. Like the music and gameplay, the graphics exhibit variety—bright and colorful in some areas, dark and moody in others—and they get even more interesting as you get deeper into the game; an aspect of the action that rewards you for your efforts. While there's a learning curve to some of the activities and puzzles the thought and creativity stand out, even if some of the gameplay elements don't always completely match the great ideas behind them.

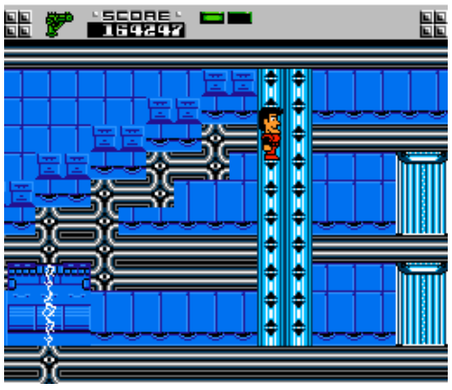
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"If this game were released three years ago it might have been acceptable, but the graphics and gameplay are substandard, the backgrounds look pasted on, and it seems like all the characters have 2-step animations. If you want to walk on ceilings try *Metal Storm* or *Strider*." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Being an incurable blasting maniac, I found the action most enjoyable after I'd found the ray gun, because then I could really set to work lasering all and sundry. The sprites, especially the big ones, are excellent, although the backgrounds are a bit naff (something had to go I suppose). The sound is jolly enough, and there's plenty of challenge there if you enjoy platform games with lots of action." —*Computer and Video Games* (May 1991)

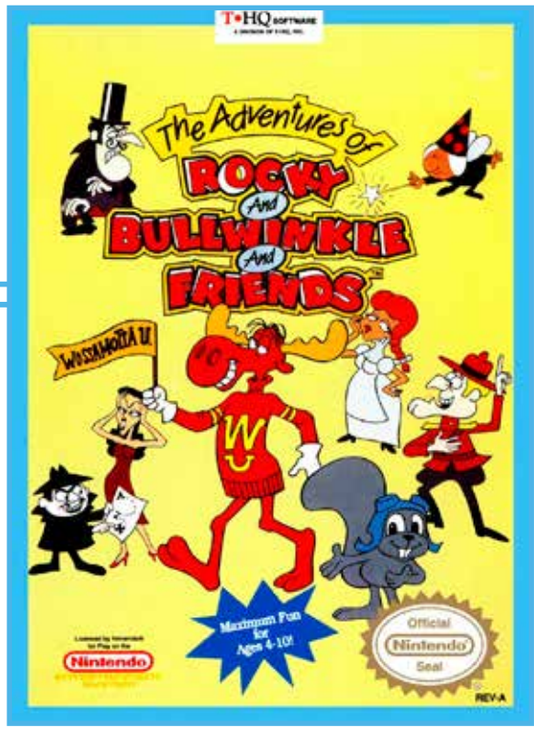
Notable Quotable:
"There's certainly plenty of action, and the sprites are really good—Rad looks the part with his whopper chin and his manful swagger as he strides into action, and some of the baddies are beautifully animated. It's a shame the backdrops aren't also up to the same high standards—they're rather plain and dull—but I suppose you can't have everything. The gameplay is quite tough, and the emphasis is squarely on blasting action, so this should therefore appeal to platform addicts who don't like puzzles getting in the way of their shooting and jumping." —*Mean Machines* (April 1991)



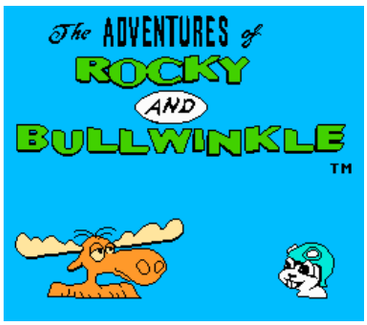


The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends is based on Jay Ward's clever and satirical cartoon series. After the death of a relative, Bullwinkle discovers he's the Lost Earl of Moosechester. To collect his inheritance, he and his pal Rocky must travel from Frostbite Falls to the Abominable Manor in England. You guide the iconic duo through five platforming levels, including mountains, a pirate ship, and a moving train. Play alternates between the flying squirrel and the charging moose as needed. For example, Rocky can fly to otherwise unreachable platforms but only Bullwinkle can climb stairs. Both are equipped with bombs for fending off classical foes Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale, who pester our heroes with bombs of their own. Jumping is slight, meaning it's difficult to leap over the various snakes, lizards, spiky balls, and other obstacles. Soda cans restore health and keys provide access to certain stages. Plagued by sluggish controls, poor animation, repetitive sound, and uninspired platforming, this licensed game, like so many, doesn't do its source material justice. Jay Ward, who also produced such cartoons as *Tom Slick* and *George of the Jungle*, passed away in 1989—at least he didn't have to witness this debacle of a game.



Notable Quotable:

"Although the slow and steady action of THQ's *Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* may not satiate the appetite of a really hungry advanced NES gamer, the lack of continues in this game give it enough challenge to provide a good snack for middle-of-the-road players." —*GamePro* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The video game looks like an authentic *Rocky and Bullwinkle* product thanks to its minimalist visuals, which mirror the show terrifically. Unfortunately, because the graphics are as sparing as the effects were on the original show, you end up with a lot of vapid environments and poorly generated images . . . Slippery control response . . . Each level is a straightforward trudge, requiring you to stop only once in a while to nab a key. There are no complex designs or clever schemes. All you receive are the most basic of platformer layouts, with one or two segments that stand out mostly because the aforementioned slippery control response renders them ridiculously tough." —Joseph Shaffer (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Rocky & Bullwinkle* was released on the NES nearly seven years after its debut and the graphics completely fail to show it. Crummy character animations and a hint of bland level design mocked up with a disgusting color palette generate this visual eyesore. The framerate also gets a sucker punch even when very little is taking place on screen. Rocky and Bullwinkle's despicable looking mugshots on the opening screen are ridiculously laughable . . . This is literally THE first game in which I have had to reach for the mute button due to the unbearable sound . . . Rather than quirky, offbeat tunes, gamers are treated to a quartet of obnoxious whistling, ringing, buzzing, thumping, bashing, and any other sound that can be defined as irritating . . . Most jumps are leaps of faith . . . bomb tossing is practically a wasted effort as the desired target is constantly in motion and they rarely detonate on impact." —Nathan Dunsmore (www.digitpress.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Adventures of Tom Sawyer

PUBLISHER: Seta
DEVELOPER: Winky Soft
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989

The rare NES game with a decidedly literary bent (or at least a literary reference point), *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has almost nothing to do with Mark Twain's brilliant classic novel, but it does feature some of the key characters. One day the scruffy scamp of the title is asleep in class, dreaming of floating down the Mississippi on a mission to rescue Becky Thatcher. The resultant adventure takes Tom through six levels (The Abandoned Ship, Down the River, Through the Forest, In the Haunted House, In the Sky, and Deep in the Cave), most of which are side-scrolling and most of which involve running, jumping, climbing, avoiding obstacles (barrels, rocks, hail, and the like), throwing rocks, and shooting a slingshot (at a variety of enemies, including birds, bats, scorpions, mutant moths, and skeleton warriors). The vertical scrolling action, on the other hand, takes place on a raft, which Tom must steer past whirlpools, fish, penguins, and eagles. In two-player mode, the second gamer controls Tom's pal, Huckleberry Finn. Though drab visually, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* presents a fairly entertaining challenge. Now go read a book (oh yeah, you already are).

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Although named after Mark Twain's literary creation, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has almost nothing to do with the novel—Tom and Huckleberry Finn square off against such enemies as pirates, skeletons, and dragons. The game itself is a prime example of the generic platformer at its worst. Flat graphics, one-hit deaths, and unforgivably poor controls plague the experience from beginning to end." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"There's a chance this game could get freaking awesome toward the end, but I can personally attest to the fact that the first five levels out of six are bland, boring, tasteless, artless, thrown together, crappy, slipshod, who-the-hell-cares, quicky, dumb, uninspired, stupid rubbish. Any charm Twain's original characters might have had is entirely absent." —Ryan DiGiorgi (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Bland and unremarkable platformer . . . The plot is told almost entirely in the manual, although the game does feature a couple of still images with no accompanying text . . . Each level also has a boss character which tends to have a simple pattern and is generally much easier than the rest of the level . . . The game does not keep score, does not have a save or password feature, and has no option screen or difficulty settings. A skilled player can probably complete the game in a half hour or so, but a novice will take a bit longer. The game is reasonably challenging, but since enemies all appear in the same place and have the same behavior every time it is simply a matter of patience and memorization to complete . . .feels like an NES launch title despite being released in 1989. The graphics and sounds are simple, the gameplay is relatively unremarkable, and the game itself is short. Even so, the controls work well, and there are no glitches or bugs. It also has almost nothing to do with the *Tom Sawyer* novel." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

After Burner

PUBLISHER: Tengen
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

It took some guts to bring *After Burner*, Sega's immersive, graphically rich 1987 arcade game—the sit-down version of which had a spiffy rotating cockpit—to the 8-bit powered NES. The game, which is unlicensed, puts players at the helm of the F-14 Thunder Cat jet (viewed from behind), which is equipped with air-to-air guided missiles and a Vulcan cannon for blasting supersonic fighters, class 1 fighters, harrier class jump jets, and helicopter gunships. To dodge the enemies and their fire you can fly upside down, use the after burner, or perform a rolling maneuver, but the jet stays near the center of the screen during flight (the sky and horizon tilt and spin in accordance with the jet's turns and rolls). Special bonus stages let you refuel and acquire more missiles. Unlike the Master System version, the NES game, which is playable, but less than spectacular, does not include the "Get Ready!" voice effects.

Memories: Even at the jaded age of 20, I was blown away when I first played *After Burner* in the arcades. The razzle-dazzle graphics, the sense of fast motion, the environmental cabinet, and the dynamic gameplay got me really excited. I enjoy many of the arcade ports for the NES, but *After Burner* fails to excite. It's certainly playable, but I can't help comparing it to the immersive coin-op game. Like *Zaxxon* for the Atari 2600, it simply can't be ported accurately enough to the NES console. It was intriguing at the time, though, to play a Sega game on a Nintendo console.

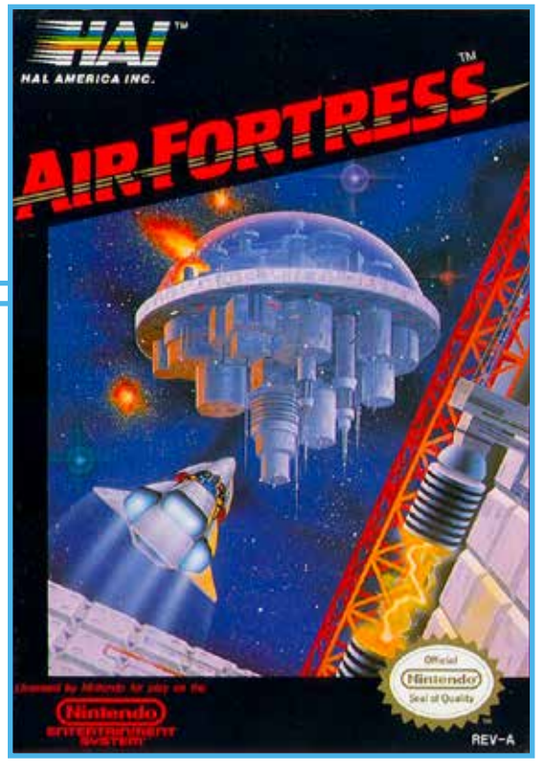
Notable Quotable:
"*After Burner* actually made me a little nauseous; enough to make me stop playing . . . Sometimes the controls move appropriately, sometimes they don't. The graphics are glitchy and awful, and do all they can to keep you from progressing. You get three lives, you die quickly, you start all over again . . . Tengen published some fantastic illegal carts. *After Burner* isn't one of them." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:
"Tengen did a respectable job converting the game . . .brutal difficulty . . . Once I realized that I didn't stand a chance of getting far enough in *After Burner* for a review I used an infinite lives code with the Game Genie . . . I realized just how much effort Tengen put into this port, as every stage from the arcade is present here as far as I can tell . . .the ending was simply a screen that said 'Congratulations' . . .pretty tedious by the last several stages, as the gameplay didn't change up very much at all, and most of the stages were mere background changes and nothing more . . . The screen still rotates when you move from side to side, but the hardware simply can't keep up and the framerate and scrolling become very choppy . . .plays better than either *Top Gun* offering and *F-15 Strike Eagle*." —Doug Jackson (www.sega-16.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Air Fortress

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



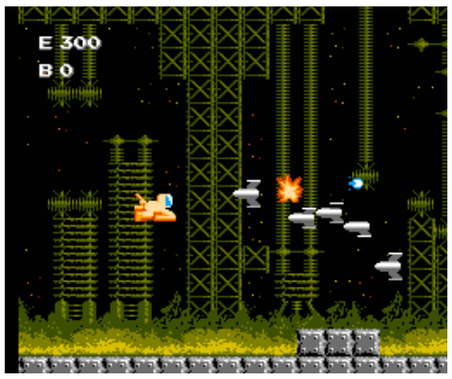
In *Air Fortress*, you pilot a spaceship through an Air Base, shooting beams at missiles, robotic machines, generic looking [illegible] shapes, and other repetitious enemies. Energy power-ups and crash beam bullets that you collect in the Air Base will determine the ship's initial power settings for the next area of the game, which is the main body of the Air Fortress, where you abandon your spaceship and the side-scrolling action in favor of a jetpack that lets you walk, float around freely, and explore the labyrinthine areas. In the Air Fortress, in addition to shooting enemies, you will fly through tunnels to find the central reactor of said fortress, blow it up, and then find your way out to reach the next Air Base. There are eight levels in all. *Air Fortress* is playable, but it could use a wider variety of power-ups and more interesting, less predictable enemies.

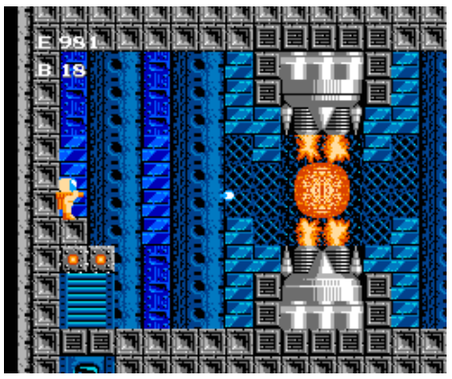
Notable Quotable:
"There are some nice graphical touches, and the catchy soundtrack has a *Lost in Space* vibe, but the gameplay feels totally by-the-numbers . . . Some of the intergalactic backgrounds are impressively detailed, but sometimes it's hard to discern objects in the foreground from the background . . . The game is challenging enough, but there's no score, and the stage designs leave much to be desired." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*Air Fortress* is definitely a 'childhood memory' game we're quite fond of. Spent hours playing it as a kid, so you may not be as stunned or as amazed by its concept or challenge. However, it's certainly a fun game to play. We particularly like the Airbase-to-Fortress idea and the varied layouts of the eight fortresses . . . My only complaint was the character itself and his lightship . . . Hal Bailman on his lightship looks more like a toddler straddling a pillow as he pretended it was some sort of vehicle." —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Underrated . . .although the game shows its age, it still looks fairly decent compared to other titles released the same year, and was given the utmost attention to detail (the gun's recoil and the game's gravity being the best examples) . . .the gameplay is definitively where the game shines . . .cleverly combines gameplay mechanics from two genres . . . gameplay flows wonderfully between the two. I like the overall ambiance of the game, especially when you destroy the reactor and must reach your escape ship—the subdued ambiance at that moment (faint lighting, creepy music, and ominous rumbling as the fortress self-destructs) is amazing." —Video Game Den (www.videogamededen.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Airwolf

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

Three years after *Airwolf*—a series that ran on CBS TV from 1984 to 1986—[illegible] of the air a game based on the show was r[illegible] for the NES. The game features twenty different missions of helicopter action as you pilot your supersonic jet copter—which is outfitted with a satellite-transmitted map display, a Doppler sensor, and a radar jammer—through the not-so-friendly skies, which are viewed from inside the cockpit of the helicopter. You'll fire machine guns and heat-seeking missiles at such enemies as flying missiles, ground missiles, and enemy planes. You can speed up, slow down, and hover. When it's time to rescue POWs the game switches to a side-view perspective, where you must avoid obstacles (control towers, mountains, and enemy fire) and land gently (à la *Lunar Lander*) to keep from crashing. You'll employ a similar landing method for refueling, making repairs, and restocking ammunition at a friendly airbase. Fans of the show will recognize the game's theme music.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"What a disappointment! Level after level of the same exact thing. The advanced levels are much harder than the early ones. The fighting sequences aren't impressive, nor difficult. *Airwolf* just goes to show that great names don't always mean great games." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:

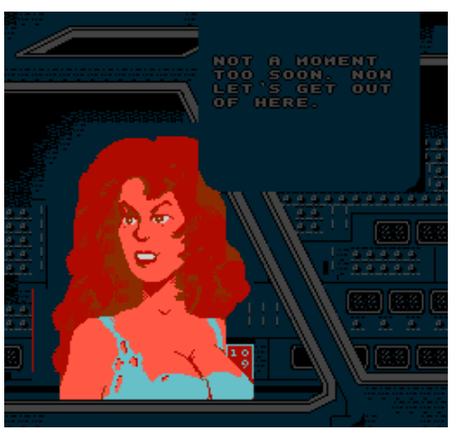
"Does *Airwolf* the video game live up to the excitement, suspense, drama, and action of the 1980s television program? Not even close . . .I'm pleased to report it's only mostly terrible. Any game with 8-bit cleavage and the *Airwolf* theme song can't be all bad . . . Like a denim jacket, this game is best left in the '80s." —CGR Publishing (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The Famicom version of *Airwolf* is loosely based on an arcade game by Kyugo Boueki originally released in 1987 (also known as *Sky Wolf*). Level layouts are completely different and boss fights don't feature a first-person view . . . Although *Airwolf* was also released in the United States and Europe, it was a totally different game developed by Acclaim. This alternate version is not a side-scrolling shooter but a first-person flying simulator similar to *After Burner* or *Top Gun* . . . We are left to wonder why this game was released instead of its Famicom counterpart." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The NES is a fantastic gaming platform; it's the home of legendary titles, incredible gameplay, and amazing experiences. It is not, however, capable of simulating any kind of flight. Its tiny Ricoh CPU makes a mockery of commanding the skies, managing to dribble out an uninspiring flat green 'ground' and a flat blue 'sky' from your HUD combined with the world's most annoying chopper blade sound whirring constantly throughout the game. You shoot at blocky things that hover out in front of you—we think they're planes—which consequently explode into other blocky things . . . In all fairness, it's pretty gutsy that the developer even attempted a 3D flight sim on the NES, but you don't get points for guts in the world of gaming, only results, and the NES *Airwolf* falls flat." —James Matson (www.retrodomination.com)



Al Unser Jr. Turbo Racing

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Data East
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Endorsed by Indy superstar Al Unser Jr., who provides tips on how to handle each course, this surprisingly elaborate racing simulation lets you drive Unser's car, or you can design one of your own. You can customize color, speed, acceleration, durability, suspension, pit crew speed, and turbo, the last of which provides up to forty miles-per-hour more than the standard velocity. The game sports a behind-the-car perspective and boasts 16 different twisting, turning courses, each in a different country. Prior to entering a World Grand Prix Series (as opposed to one of two different Time Trial modes) you must race a qualifying lap to determine your pole position.

Notable Quotable:

"*Unser* does present some new themes like a pit stop and qualifying for each race, but the execution of these good ideas is poor. Some high points unfortunately don't save it." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Being a bit of a speed freak, I thoroughly enjoyed playing this . . .smooth, fast and convincing, and the computer opponents are no dummies, so you really do have to race to get a decent grid position, making the game challenging and exciting. The most important thing in a race game is that the action is fast and exhilarating, and I found that with *Turbo Racing* this is certainly the case—the opposing cars weave about, and if you're not concentrating it's easy to spin off on a corner." —*Mean Machines* (April 1991)

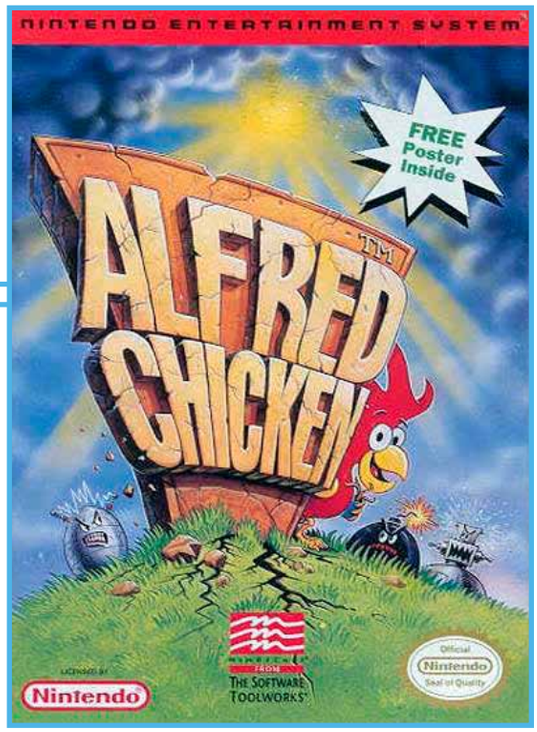
Notable Quotable:

"The start of each main race is brutal, as cars litter the narrow tracks, making it difficult to overtake without crashing or bumping into them. CPU drivers are overly aggressive and always seem to move into your direct line or try to knock you off the track. There's tons of sprite flicker and sometimes opponent cars disappear completely . . .aims to be a realistic take on the sport, and if you're a very patient gamer you might get some enjoyment out of it. It's certainly not an awful game, but for me the gameplay is too rigid and doesn't have that pick-up-and-play nature that the best driving titles seem to have." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Alfred Chicken

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Twilight
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1994



During the early to mid-1990s, cute yet quirky platformers were about as common as first-person shooters are today. In this example of the genre, Alfred Chicken is on a mission to rescue a hot chick named Flo[illegible]m the fiendish Meka Chickens, backed by a nice musical score. Tasks related to this endeavor include firing bombs at monsters, dive-bombing enemies, pecking through ice, picking up invincibility presents, opening doors to secret rooms, jumping on moving platforms, bouncing on springs, swimming like a duck, and much more. To complete a level you must pop every balloon, and diamonds can be grabbed for extra points and lives. Blocks must be pecked to allow Alfred access to otherwise restricted locations, giving the game an additional challenge. Unlike most side-scrollers, *Alfred Chicken*, which was first produced for the Game Boy, frequently scrolls vertically. *Super Alfred Chicken* for the SNES followed.

Notable Quotable:

"While *Alfred Chicken*'s graphics and sound give it a cartoon feel, don't be lulled into thinking the action is child's play—the puzzles can get quite complex. And the fact that Alfred perishes each time he's hit can be a major cause of frustration, though frequent balloon checkpoints keep you from backtracking too much when you restart . . .no continues or passwords to help you out . . .you need a lot of patience." —*Game Players* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

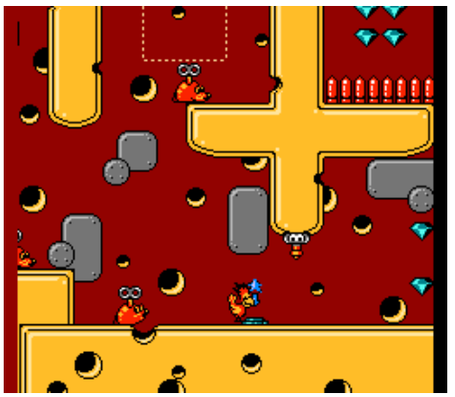
"The game is insultingly easy and poses little challenge; it's also far too short and can be completed in around 30 minutes. There's only one music track, which sounds like an irritating TV theme tune, and it quickly gets on your nerves! *Alfred Chicken* is a lackluster title with tedious level design, little variety, and substandard boss battles . . .it's full of half-baked ideas, and the fact that there's only five short levels screams of lazy game development." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

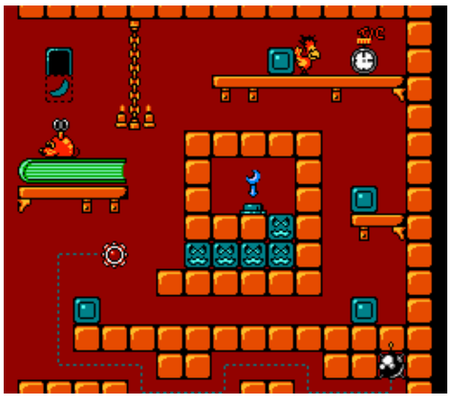
Notable Quotable:

"For an NES game, *Alfred Chicken*'s graphics sparkle. Most of the characters have a cartoony look—simply drawn, but with googly eyes and other funny features . . . The bouncy, loopy audio sounds as goofy as the characters look. Crystal clear effects fill out the aural experience. Most puzzle games require unusual control pad manipulations, beyond the standard jumping and character movement. In *Alfred Chicken*, you must learn to time dive bombs and peck at blocks to make things happen. Thankfully the crisp controls aren't too intricate and it doesn't take long to master the action." —*GamePro* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"A weird, quirky, childish platformer that would be below average if it wasn't so determined to be a standout freak among the NES' platforming library. The game is fairly short, spanning only five levels, but if you're into straight-up mind-trippery you should probably give it a shot . . .a strange land filled with cheese, snails, balloons, and smiling sunflowers . . .feels like it's trying to capture that Mario-esque sense of weird, but Mario did it naturally, and it played like a champ. *Alfred Chicken* throws in everything it can to weird out the player . . .but in more of an unsettling, creepy way. I highly doubt this was the point, as the game was very much made for kids, but the creepiness remains . . . Otherwise it's an average platformer starring another me-too sidekick in the era when Mario and Sonic were the only ones that mattered." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

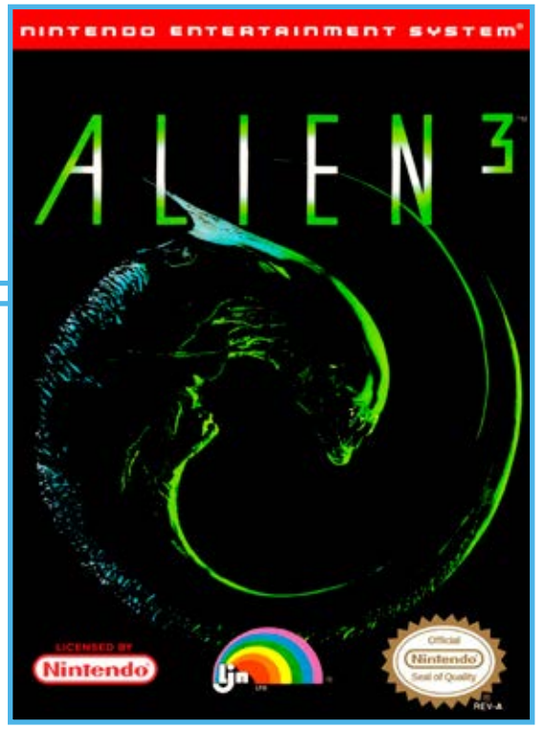




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Alien 3

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Probe Software
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



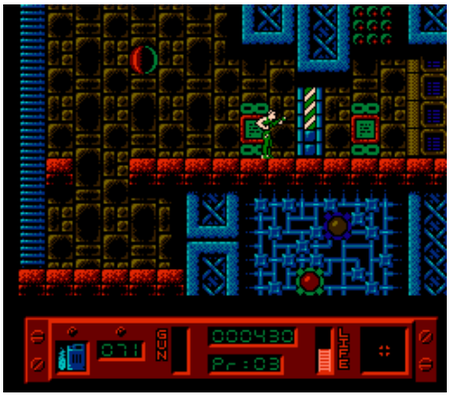
As a huge fan of *Alien* and *Aliens*, I was hugely disappointed with David Fincher's awful *Alien 3*, which hit theaters in 1992. The first twenty minutes or so showed promise, but it devolved into utter crap. Fortunately, *Alien 3* for the NES is superior to its silver screen counterpart, despite being published by LJN. You guide female hero Lt. Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver in the movie) through six stages of the Fiorina 161 prison colony (consisting of maze-like tunnels, passageways, and ladders) using a machine gun, grenades, and a flamethrower to battle the trademark creepy creatures of the title. A motion tracker warns Ripley of nearby aliens and prisoners, the latter of which are cocooned and must be rescued. Atmospheric visuals and music, solid controls, and a nice mix of exploration and intense action make *Alien 3* one of the better movie-based games for the system, but an unforgiving time limit keeps the game from being great.

Memories: I love the NES, of course, but I spent most of my *Alien 3* time on the go with the Sega Game Gear. I hated the film, with its orange tint, depressingly humorless tone, and yelling protagonist, but I heard good things about the game, so I picked up several versions of it. I've been a fan of the *Alien* franchise since I saw the original movie on cable TV during the early 1980s. I remember kids talking about it at school in 1979, but I was only twelve and had no way to see it (my parents didn't ban me from it necessarily—it just wasn't an option).

Notable Quotable:
"The first two *Alien* movies never had an NES game. Why didn't they make those? This game was nothing more than an advertisement for the movie . . .it served its purpose back then but has no significance today . . . Want to play a better *Alien* game that still holds up? *Alien Trilogy* on PlayStation." —Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics and sound do a commendable job of replicating the movie's atmosphere . . . The sprites are a little on the small side, but are drawn pretty well with good animation, and they resemble their movie counterparts nicely, especially the aliens. Some of the areas do look too similar, making it easy to get lost. The creepy background music of each level is very well done and fits in with the theme. The sound effects are nothing special but do their job nicely . . .some solid action and plenty to shoot, plus some nice tense moments just like the flick. Unfortunately the controls use the reverse setup where B jumps and A shoots, and you have to push Select to cycle through your weapons, during which aliens could descend on you . . .the game's high difficulty is its biggest flaw . . .a decent movie-based title." —Adam King (www.nestimes.net)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Alien Syndrome

PUBLISHER: Tengen
DEVELOPER: Sanritsu Denki
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989

Although more colorful and cartoonish than any of the *Alien* movies, *Alien Syndrome* evokes the popular film series. Players, controlling Ricky or Mary, explore seven different maze-like, multi-room spaceships to shoot H. R. Giger-influenced aliens (which are pink instead of black), rescue captive humans, and exit before the timer runs out. There are other types of creatures to shoot as well. Each spaceship you explore is equipped with an assortment of helpful items, including warps, fireballs, laser cannons (an especially effective weapon), and flamethrowers. While it's not as challenging or as graphically rich as Sega's original 1986 arcade game, *Alien Syndrome* for the NES is preferable to the Sega Master System version, thanks in large part to the NES game keeping the two-player simultaneous mode. In addition, it has a mapping system you won't find in the Master System game. This helps players keep track of their position in relation to the captives. Unlicensed.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"I first played this overhead shooter on the Sega Master System, but I much prefer this more robust NES edition . . . The game gets off to a slow start, with beginning stages that are really easy. The background music can't match the menacing tones of the Sega Master System game and the sound effects are also disappointing. This NES edition plays better, but offers a somewhat forgettable shooting experience." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

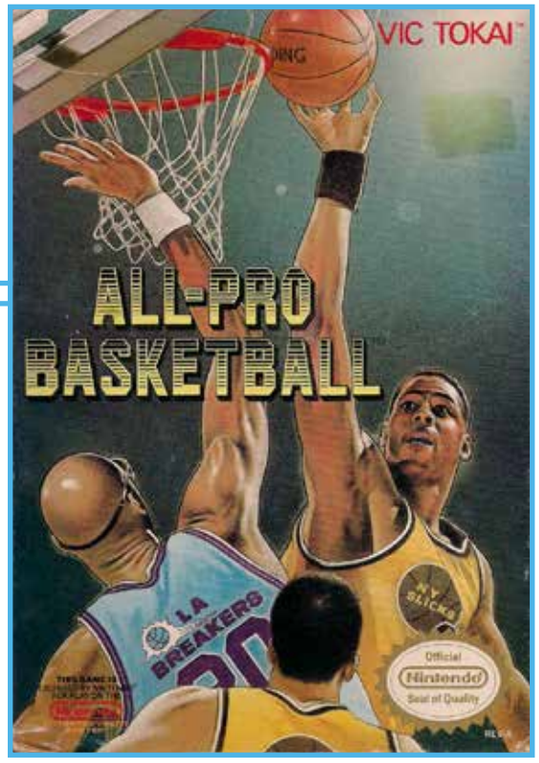
"Pretty clearly a ripoff of the movie *Aliens* . . .relatively faithful to the arcade version, even offering two-player simultaneous play and a new intro cinema. The characters walk much slower though, and you must rescue every single prisoner before you can fight the boss. The bosses are also pretty similar, although some of their attacks had to be scaled down. —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

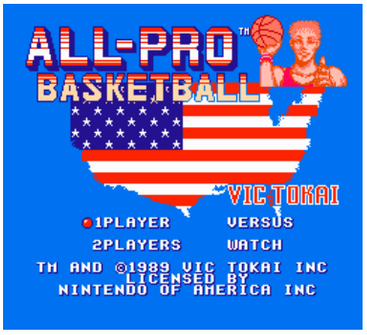
Notable Quotable:

"The overall presentation takes a big hit when compared to the arcade original. The graphics are simple and the backgrounds are lacking in detail. On the other hand the game moves fast, and the levels are interesting enough to make up for the rudimentary graphics . . . I found myself dodging most of the bad guys to keep from running out of time. The game's various boss battles are a weak point, mostly because they are long, drawn-out, and rarely clear on what needs to be accomplished. Even if the gameplay is repetitive and the graphics are poor, the action is still a lot of fun. Two-player support adds to the excitement." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

All-Pro Basketball

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Aicom
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989





Like the more popular, more fondly remembered *Double Dribble*, *All-Pro Basketball* features five-on-five [illegible] and animated slam dunk close-ups. P[illegible] can go at it head-to-head or team up against the computer. The game lets you select from eight different teams (each with different players and stats), sporting such fake names as the L.A. Breakers and the New York Slicks. Features include three-pointers, blocked shots, league play, fouls, steals, jump passes, substitutions for tired players, the ability to switch defenders, and more. The computer is good at stealing the ball, but scoring, including fast break dunks, is nevertheless much too easy. The overhead view court, which scrolls vertically (and just a bit horizontally), goes black for a second and switches sides every time the ball crosses half court, making for a disorienting experience. Passwords let you save tournament progress.

Memories: The box art for *All-Pro Basketball* always intrigued me. That is obviously meant to look like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar on the cover, complete with safety goggles and an LA jersey. Of course Kareem played for the Los Angeles Lakers, not the fictional Breakers. Who is that New York Slicks player getting ready to dunk on Kareem meant to look like? Anyone? Maybe one of you hardcore Knicks fans can let me know.

Notable Quotable:

"There's a lot going on here. It's very busy and messy looking . . .interrupts the flow of the game when it swaps half-courts . . . The closeup of the player dunking or missing is a neat concept, but it really takes away from the rhythm of the game. The game took a lot of risks to try to be different and revolutionary, which is not a bad thing to try, but it just didn't work out so well." —Trevor Pawlak (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Neither the worst of the b-ball lot, nor the greatest . . . Give me *Tecmo NBA* or even *Ultimate Basketball* if you must . . . I would rather play *Double Dribble* or *Arch Rivals*. And honestly even *Harlem Globetrotters*, if purely for sentimental reasons . . .so darn forgettable . . .big, bland, boring teams, wrapped in shallow casings of location and name." —NintendoLegend (nintendolegend.com)

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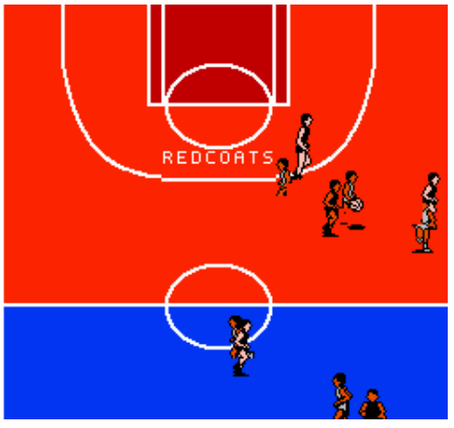
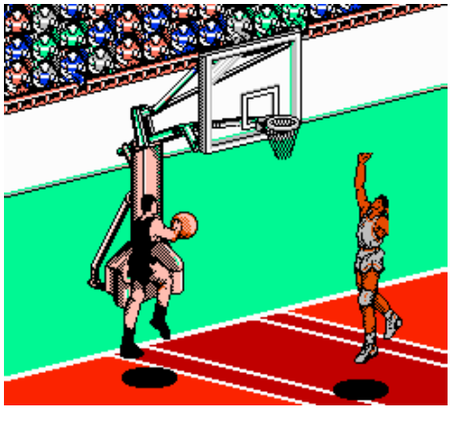
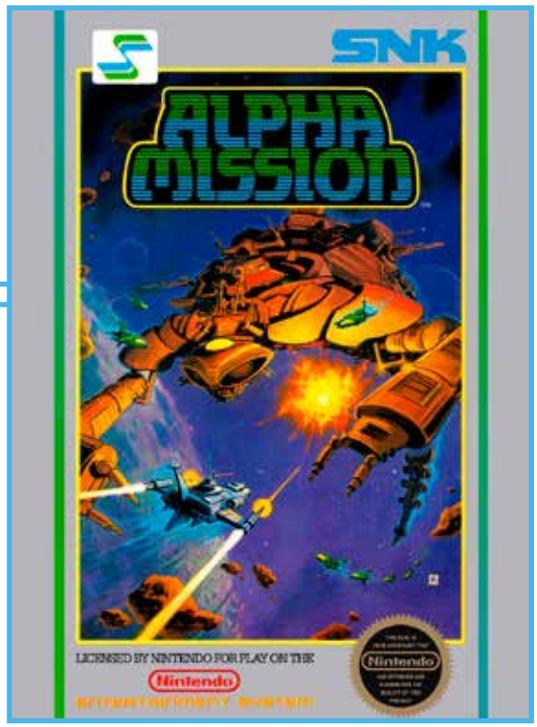




Alpha Mission

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



In *Alpha Mission*, gamers guide a SYD fighter ship up the screen, shooting lasers and missiles at ground-based targets and a variety of circling, zigzagging, diving, otherwise pesky airborne alien vessels. Picking up over letter icons the SYD can increase its speed, warp ahead or back three levels, and boost the power of its lasers and missiles. An arsenal of special weapons, including eight-way fire, guided missiles, thunder, and nuclear warheads, can also be acquired. *Alpha Mission*, which is a battle against the invading Seven Stars Alliance, who want to claim Earth as home, looks and plays similar to Namco's 1983 coin-op classic *Xevious* (which was ported nicely to the NES). It is less nuanced, less balanced, and less enjoyable than that far more popular game. Fans of the game, which is based on SNK's 1985 coin-op, might want to hunt down its sequel, *Alpha Mission II* (arcade, Neo Geo, Neo Geo CD).

Notable Quotable:

"A nice game . . . I like the sequel better . . .hard as nails . . .the music is terrible and the sound effects aren't much better. This game's strength is the gameplay . . . The trick to this game is to save your energy until you get to an end boss and choose whatever weapon is best for that end boss." —CGR Publishing (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The soundtrack to this game is quite impressive. The music is action packed and upbeat, truly inspiring the player to battle with all their might . . . Graphically, the game is easy on the eyes, but rather rigid and uninspired . . .suffers from a steep difficulty curve . . .relentless and punishing . . . I kept finding myself returning to the game just to see if I could get a bit farther." —David Buck (nintendotimes.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The best-looking graphics in the game are those of the ship and its various upgraded forms . . . The ship is incredibly sluggish if you don't have any speed-ups . . . Fortunately you can get plenty of speed-ups pretty early on. The problem occurs if you accidentally pick up an item that makes you lose all your speed-ups . . .easily one of the most difficult shooters I've ever played . . .there are far too many 'kamikaze' enemies that change direction at the last possible second and ram into your ship, giving you no chance to dodge." —Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The bland backgrounds and unimaginative enemy designs (for the most part) are sadly stale even by comparison of other games released in the same general time frame . . . You've spent a decent amount of effort bulking up your shot, improving your bombs, and speeding up your ship so you at least have a fair shot of dodging most enemies. Then you pick up a C or a backwards K and—BOOM!—you realize you've lost the effect of every single power-up you've collected over the course of the game . . . Bosses aren't exactly bursting with imagination. Of the first four, they all have roughly the same attack . . .a very tough game, but the challenge is due to the cheapness. A slow-moving ship combined with 'power-ups' that actually destroy your ship's ability to fight effectively and enemies that bombard you quickly from all angles is not exactly a fun challenge." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

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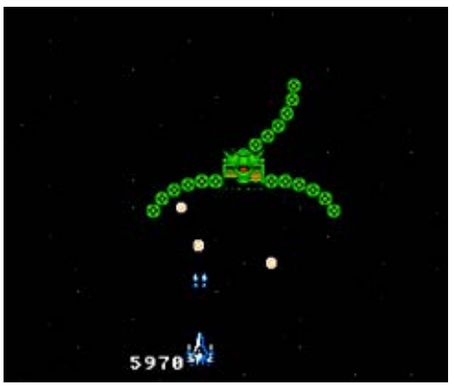

Amagon

PUBLISHER: American Sammy
DEVELOPER: Aicom
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

You are Amagon, a decorated Marine who must run, jump, and shoot his way through the plains, jungles, rivers, rainforests, mountains, and beaches of a monster-infested (though bland-looking) South Pacific island. To battle the dinosaurs, bats, snakes, wasps, skeletons, aliens, elephant men, hippo demons, and other creatures you'll encounter, you're equipped with a machine gun. By finding a Mega-key and scoring at least 5,000 points you can transform into Magagon, which makes you bigger and tougher and equips you with laser beams and a megapunch maneuver. The action leaves little margin for error (the one-hit kill system will frustrate many), making for a difficult game.

Notable Quotable:

"You start out weak, but after earning 5,000 points and finding the Mega key, you're able to transform into the powerful Megagon. This alter ego can survive multiple hits depending on your point total, which encourages you to kill more enemies and take more risks. Transforming into Megagon is a difficult task, since Amagon gets killed after only one hit. The graphics are primitive and the sound lacks intricacy and creativity." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are clear and bright, but most of the anemic sprites are tiny, ugly, and aren't readily identifiable, owing to the overall lack of detail. The backdrops are mostly uninteresting static images . . . The sound is severely lacking—the obnoxious, high-pitched tunes often drop out because of the strange squeak noise that plays when an enemy is killed. Further damning the game are the awkward and imprecise controls: Amagon's gun can be slow to shoot, making for a lot of wasted ammo, and the speed and arc at which he jumps makes it nearly impossible to accurately shoot an enemy while in the air. While *Amagon* isn't completely broken or unplayable, its shoddy gameplay mechanics and generic aesthetics make for a boring and frustrating time that not even nostalgia can overcome." —NintendoComplete.com

Notable Quotable:

"Truly useful power-ups are few and far between. Points are fairly common. Ammo appears frequently enough, but only if you're already playing conservatively . . . Control is a chore. Your machine gun doesn't auto-fire, though this is probably a good thing, since you'd end up wasting even more bullets. Holding the jump button results in a longer and higher jump, as it should, but it also results in a double jump if you're still holding it when you hit the ground. This is never useful, but can be damned annoying when you jump right off a moving platform . . . Maybe moving carefully through each level wouldn't be so boring if there was anything unique to experience. For an island populated by monsters, enemies are pretty uninspired, at least in the first few levels I was able to force myself to play. Old NES standbys such as birds, snakes, and spiders will form the majority of your nemeses . . . *Amagon* is hurt the most not by its faults but by its lack of strengths." —Ryan DiGiorgi (justgamesretro.com)

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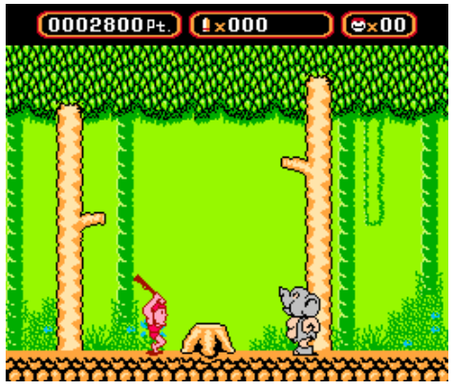
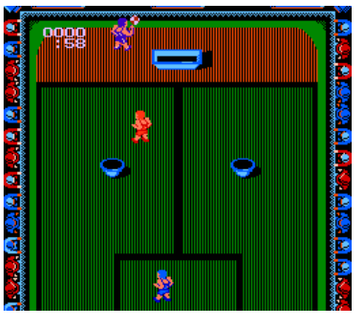


American Gladiators

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Incredible Technologies
GAME TYPE: Sports/Extreme, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Adapted from the popular television series that ran 1989–1996, *American Gladiators* lets you compete in six different events: Joust, Wall, Human Cannonball, Powerball, Assault, and Eliminator. Depending on the event, you'll battle with padded sticks, climb walls while trying to avoid getting knocked off, swing on ropes to knock the other Gladiator off his or her platform, scoop up balls and throw them into a chute, run through obstacle courses, avoid being hit with a high-speed ball launcher, and more. After you complete all five events the game resumes on a higher difficulty level with alternate patterns and stage layouts. If you complete all four levels, you'll open up a sixth event called the Eliminator. The graphics are plain, but the events are a fun (if ephemeral) diversion from standard sports video games. Includes three "real" Gladiators from the TV show: Gold, Laser, and Nitro. The NES cartridge lacks the Atlasphere event that is in the Genesis and SNES versions.

Notable Quotable:

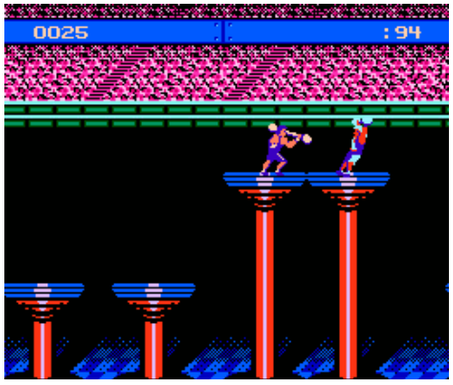
"*American Gladiators* is easily the pinnacle of GameTek's brief existence and is one of the best 'sports' titles for the NES. The Super Nintendo version, on the other hand, doesn't fare as well. It more accurately depicts most of the events in their proper form, but it's boring in comparison to the NES version." —Cygnus Destroyer (YouTube)

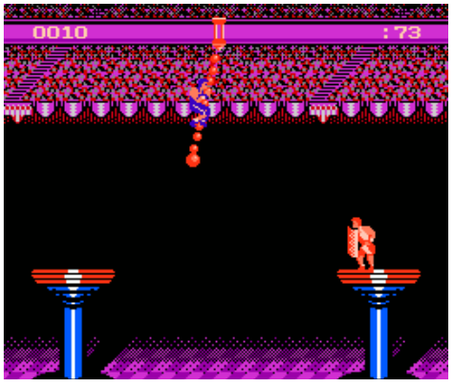
Notable Quotable:

"These games are neat the first time through. After level one boredom sets in. The wall is particularly pathetic. You have to alternate the A and B buttons to get your contestant up the wall. If you place one of his/her hands on an empty space you fall and must start over again. Very annoying . . .the Joust and Cannonball events are fun because of the screaming . . . The variety helps, but the poor graphics and repetitive play sink this game." —The Vault (vimm.net)

Notable Quotable:

"The *American Gladiators* TV show was a guilty pleasure that translated into an equally ridiculous video game . . . One of my problems with this game is the erratic nature of some of the events. Some are kind of fun and reminiscent of the TV show while others suffer poor control and seem a bit forced . . . I thought I'd like the Joust event, but there didn't seem to be much balance between the exchange of hits. The Wall was okay for a brief time . . .it doesn't offer enough good gameplay elements for someone not vested in playing against the Gladiators. It will bring back memories of Blaze, Nitro, and Lace, but it won't offer compelling play for those seeking a good gaming experience . . . I wish the two-player mode could pit the contestants against the Gladiators, played by one of the players. Playing as one of the Gladiators would have spiced it up a bit. That probably wouldn't have saved it, but I dig the idea." —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Anticipation

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988

Anticipation
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
Nintendo's first video board game
PARTY FUN FOR ALL AGES!
Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

A board game you can play on your television set, *Anticipation* lets up to four players compete to identify pictures being drawn on screen by the computer. The first player to buzz in must identify the picture correctly to move their marker—shoes, ice cream, a teddy bear, or a trumpet—around a color-coded game board. There are 16 picture categories, including music, weaponry, math, tools, food, and clothing. Retro gamers will appreciate the fact that one of the puzzle pictures appears to be a *Space Invaders* alien. In easier levels of play the computer connects dots to create the pictures. In advanced levels there are few or no dots. Advanced levels also introduce feature squares and drop-out squares, both of which should be avoided. If you like *Pictionary* and *Win, Lose or Draw* you should enjoy *Anticipation*. Curiously, the Nintendo Seal of Approval isn't on the cartridge, but it is on the back of the box.

Notable Quotable:

"Though the game gets more difficult as you progress, it's never exactly hard . . . The graphics are adequate . . . The music is made up of a few campy jazz-like beats. Each colored category has its own theme, as well as a few scattered tunes, such as the music that plays when you answer a question or move about the board . . . Four people willing to play a game will probably have much more fun with an old-fashioned physical board game. Though you can play by yourself against the computer, the challenge is somewhat lacking and pointless." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

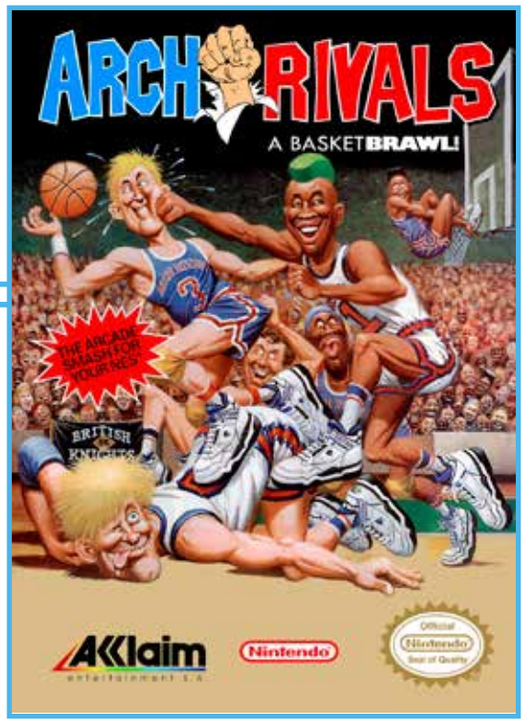
Insider Insight: You could argue that board games are the antithesis to video games, and admittedly there is something to the tactility of actually rolling a die or drawing a card from a stack, or moving a miniature avatar that provides an immediate and direct connection between the player and the game's abstract mechanics. Video games, on the other hand, have to create the illusion of that connection, and for a long time, when it came to video game adaptations of board games, there always seemed to be such a disconnect in the suspension of disbelief. That probably explains why digital board games were such a niche genre on the NES. Enter *Anticipation*, a completely legitimate video board game developed by none other than Rare.

This was one of several games that showed up unannounced under the tree one Christmas morning when I was a kid, and I wasn't sure what to make of it. The first time we all sat down and played it together, though, it turned into an all-night family gaming session, and it was the star of the show on New Year's Eve a few days later. I'd never seen a video game do anything like that before and very few since. The idea of our whole family, and even friends and neighbors, all playing a video game together sounded like some cheesy commercial in the making, but I have a lot of fond memories of those times. Interestingly though, the more we played the harder the game became, as we all memorized the catalog of images and came to know the exact counts for moving squares on the board to ascend the levels as quickly as possible. The competition became outright cutthroat at times, making the game feel every bit as hardcore as any fighting game or side-scrolling brawler. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Arch Rivals: A Basket Brawl!

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



You've played basketball. Now play "basket-brawl," which is hoops the way you wish you could play—with no rules. *Arch Rivals* looks like normal basketball: two c teams, cheerleaders, an energetic co crowd, and even an ad banner for British Knights (the athletic footwear company), but it doesn't have fouls. So go ahead and punch that other guy in the face—the bungling referee can't see and oftentimes gets in the way of the players. Match-ups are two-on-two, and you can pick which of the eight available players you would like on your team. Player abilities supposedly vary in terms of fighting, rebounding, quickness, range, and ball handling, but as long as they can throw a good punch (and maybe even run, jump, and shoot) you should be all right with whichever players you choose. Options include preprogrammed team names and uniform colors. Games are four quarters in length, with each quarter lasting three minutes. A precursor to the two-on-two arcade stylings of *NBA Jam*, *Arch Rivals* was first released in the arcades in 1989 by Bally/Midway.

Notable Quotable:
"While the game retains most of the gameplay from the coin-op, it's plagued with choppy animation and poor control. Despite its shortcomings the game is still fun to play, especially in the 2-player mode." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Good graphics for an NES basketball game. The players are nice and large and run around the court easily. The basic controls are simple . . . The gameplay is pretty smooth, and you can even shatter the glass of the backboard if you execute the perfect dunk . . . The no-rules aspect is fun . . . [The action] stops after every basket to show you the score and a reaction shot from the crowd. There is no way to skip through this animation, which means that there is no way to really crank up the pace of the game . . . The sound effects are fun but repetitive; the sound of you punching your opponent never fails to be satisfying . . . If you could play a tournament or a season with a password or battery then this game would be substantially better. If the eight players you could choose from were noticeably different then this game would be better. If the four teams that you could pick from were different in any way other than color then this game would be better." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: In the early '90s in the UK, there was a short-lived craze for basketball. In addition to NBA games being shown on TV, a professional UK basketball league was started up, hoping to take advantage of this newfound interest in the sport. My brother and I keenly supported our local team, the Hemel Hempstead Royals. (Unfortunately, the b-ball fad died down after a few years, and most of those teams either went back to being semi-pro or disappeared completely.) With the sudden interest in the sport also came a flurry of basketball based video games, and one of the first ones I remember seeing was *Arch Rivals* for the NES. A conversion of the Midway coin-op of the same name, it held extra appeal by throwing away the rules in favor of fighting!

Many years later I learned *Arch Rivals* was co-designed by Brian Colin, the man responsible for creating *Rampage* and *Xenophobe*, and suddenly much of the game's style made sense. After chatting with Brian on several occasions I wrote a "Making of *Arch Rivals*" feature for *Retro Gamer* #171. While the core of the article was about the arcade game, I did compare the home conversions. Among them, of course, is this NES port, which has a few strange quirks but remains fairly authentic. The only real omission is the digitized speech. This aside, I'd argue that it's actually a better conversion than the one Acclaim released for the 16-bit Sega console! —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

Archon

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Bullet-Proof Software
GAME TYPE: Board Game/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989

Want to spice up the otherwise stately game of chess? Or at least play something that will appeal to chess fans looking for something a little different? Try *Archon*, which is similar in principal to battle chess but uses different moves and mythological creatures instead of traditional chess pieces. There's a light side and a dark side. The light side has heroes, such as archers, knights, valkyries, and unicorns, while the dark side has monsters, such as banshees, manticores, and trolls. When two characters land on the same spot on the 9×9 board the action switches to a combat arena in which players battle to the death with swords, fireballs, clubs, or other weapons. There are obstacles in the arena, such as tombstones or skulls. The color of the square on the chessboard determines which side has more power. If you're light it's good to fight on lighter squares, and if you're dark, battling on darker squares is to your advantage. The squares constantly change their color, moving through six shades of blue.

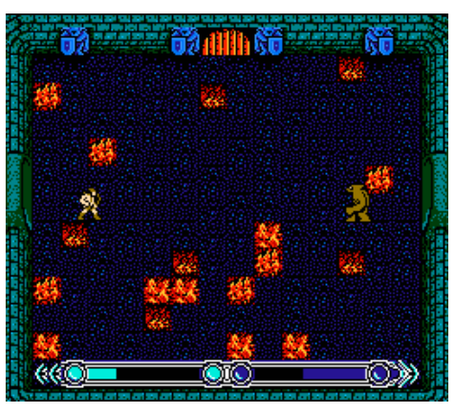
Certain characters can conjure spells to teleport, summon the elements, reverse color patterns, and revive or regenerate weary or dead creatures. *Archon* is an excellent game of strategy broken up nicely by real-time battles. Based on Electronic Arts' 1983 computer game.

Notable Quotable:

"It deeply troubles me that a whole generation of gamers may be missing out on this monumental classic . . . *Archon* is as fun as it sounds. The characters are small but cleverly animated, and well-orchestrated music adds to the fun." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The setup makes it look like it's chess, but it isn't chess, not by a long shot . . . You scream, you cry, you mash buttons, and you taunt the other guy while trying desperately to stab the dragon while it's spewing fireballs . . .the music, graphics, gameplay, controls, and animation are all terrific considering how old the game is . . .a really simple fighting game; you just hold the direction you wish to strike or fire a projectile and mash A . . .overly simple and repetitive . . .really fun to play for 15 or 20 minutes, but after that you'll wish you were playing something more recent, like *Mass Effect* or *Skyrim*." —Aaron Dennis (vocal.media)



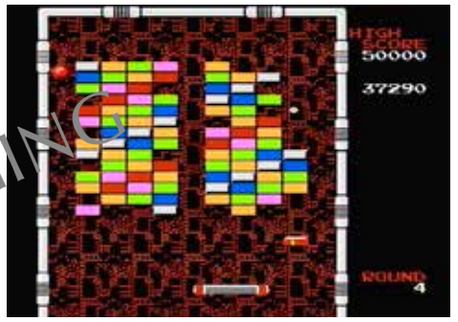
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Arkanoid

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Taito
GAME TYPE: Ball-and-Paddle, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987

I love *Breakout*-inspired, brick-busting, ball-and-paddle games, and *Arkanoid* for the NES is one of the best, thanks in large part to supporting the "Vaus" rotary controller, which it originally came packaged with. This allows for precise and speedy paddle movement, similar to the paddle controllers that came with the Atari 2600 (sadly, unlike the Atari paddles, the Vaus controller isn't compatible with any other games). In this game you guide a paddle along the bottom of the screen, rebounding a bouncing energy ball off of various space walls, eliminating colored bricks as they are hit. The ball bounds at a different angle depending on where it hits the paddle. There's floating space debris that alters the course of the ball when hit (adding unpredictability to the action), and certain walls contain power capsules that come down the screen. Grab them and they'll do such things as widen the paddle, warp the game to the next round (there are 33 rounds in all, including a final boss battle), or split the ball into three. Best of all is laser fire, which temporarily turns the game into a shooter. You can use the standard d-pad to play the game, but you'll want to hunt down a Vaus controller. A stellar port of Taito's own 1986 coin-op classic.

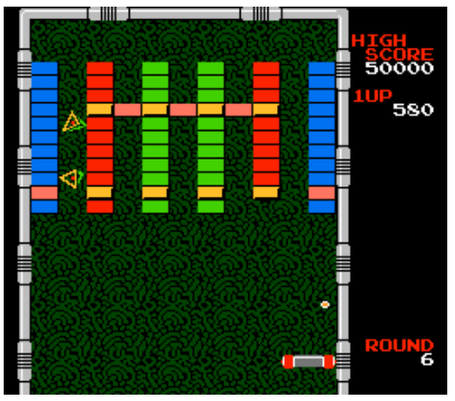
Memories: When I stumbled across *Breakout* at the Northeast Mall in Hurst, Texas, in 1976, I was mesmerized by the game. Here was *Pong*, but for one player and with bricks to bust! It was the arcade cab that made me like video games even more than my beloved pinball. Enter *Arkanoid*, which expanded the concept much further and refreshed the stale-at-the-time genre. For me, it was a no-brainer to pick up the game immediately when it came out for the NES, even though the pack-in controller made it more expensive than the average title. My complete copy is one of the prizes in my collection, especially now that the box and controller are considered hard-to-find collector's items.



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

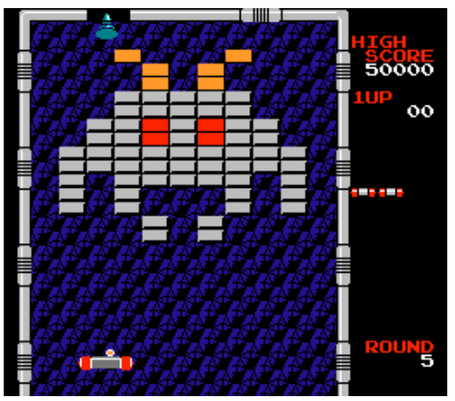
Notable Quotable:

"A simple concept delivered effectively . . . The graphics are also kept wonderfully simple. They are clean and clear, with bright images . . .vibrantly colored brick walls . . . Amazingly, there is no slowdown, even when multiple balls and enemies crowd the screen . . . There are no really significant variations, just slight increases in speed and block pattern from stage to stage . . .an outstanding game." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)



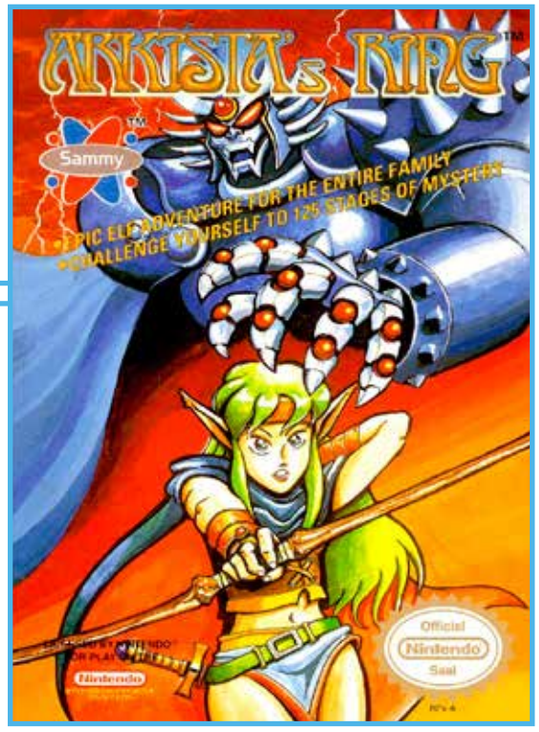
Notable Quotable:

"Think *Alleyway* but better . . . The decorative fields give every stage a different feel from the last. Some can be hilariously easy to complete while others can be crushingly tough . . .the relentless speed of the action and lack of a pause button require a level of attentiveness that can be pretty exhausting . . .arcade difficulty done right . . . *Arkanoid* demands much of the player, but it also arms the player with the tools they need to succeed." —Jeremy Parish (YouTube)



Arkista's Ring

PUBLISHER: American Sammy
DEVELOPER: NMK
GAME TYPE: Maze Shooter/ Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990


ARKISTA's RING
Sammy
EPIC ELF ADVENTURE FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY
CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO 125 STAGES OF MYSTERY
Official Nintendo Seal

A charming, simplistic, action-oriented fantasy RPG, *Arkista's Ring* has players guiding an elf girl named Christine through villages, castles, graveyards, caves, and other colorful overhead-view locations, firing magic shots at such enemies as scorpions, goblins, wolves, skeletons, bats, magicians, and ninjas. Killing enough creatures makes a key appear, which unlocks the next stage. After stage 31 (there are 125 stages in all) the stages repeat, but get harder. Defeated enemies frequently leave behind a pouch containing an item or a power-up, such as a fire wand, a holy stick, armor, a helmet, a shield, or a ninja stunner. The depth of the gameplay pales in comparison to *The Legend of Zelda*, but *Arkista's Ring* could serve as a beginner's guide to the genre. *Gauntlet* fans may also enjoy it, as it has similar maze shooter elements.

Notable Quotable:

"It's not uncommon to be completely overwhelmed by enemies on virtually any map . . . Most monsters require multiple hits from your trusty bow to destroy, and in the later areas some make use of projectiles that can make it difficult to avoid damage when facing them in narrow corridors. Some areas are nearly impossible without inventive use of the power-ups, which is more than a little annoying." —Infinity Retro (infinityretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

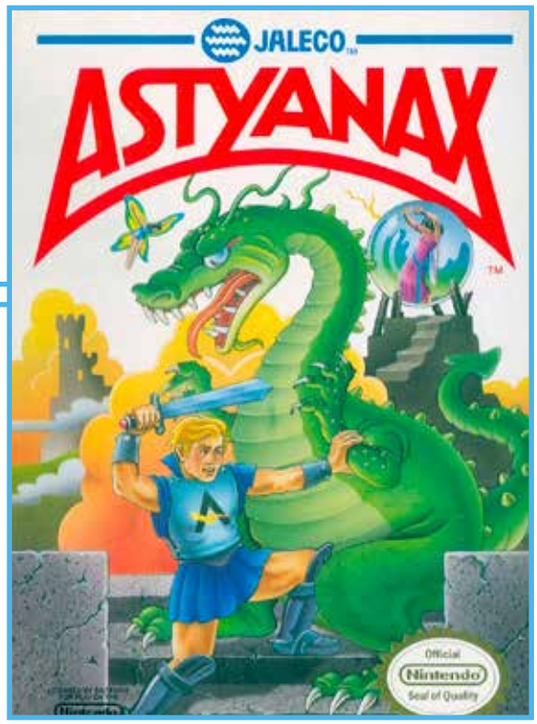
"Visually, *Arkista's Ring* is pleasing, if simple . . . The environments are very diverse. While some of the sprites are palette-swapped, they combine with other environmental elements to create believable surroundings . . .the designers really give you a sense that you're moving through a larger world instead of just 32 separate screens . . .one would expect a greater variety of background music. However, the music provided is both memorable and fitting . . . It's a great game to pick up, pop in, and kill 20 or 30 minutes." —Steve Schoen (www.geeksundergrace.com)

Insider Insight: While not completely obscure, as NES games go, *Arkista's Ring* can easily be called one of those "hidden gems" that not too many NES players seem to have played back in the day. At first glance, it's easy to understand why most players might have dismissed it. The game has simplistic, admittedly unimpressive graphics with minimalistic audio, making it more akin to early pre-NES Famicom titles, seemingly missing the flash and pizazz of later, more memorable titles in the 8-bit era. Strangely, though, I fell in love with the game decades ago, mostly because of its simplicity, and I continue to hold it in esteem and cherish the memories of playing it in good company as a kid. *Arkista's Ring* was a regular rental for me and a few of my childhood friends. I also remember experimenting with this game a number of times with a Game Genie, which was a great way to get more value out of certain NES titles. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Astyanax

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: Aicom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



You are a 16-year-old boy named Astyanax. Not only do you have to deal with that silly name, you have the same dream night after night of a princess calling for help. It turns out you are the chosen one, and you must rescue Princess Rosebud of Remlia from the castle of wizard Blackhorn. As you run, jump, duck, and teleport your way through 12 levels of play you will use a broad axe, a spear, and a sword to fend off winged dragons, metamorphosing monsters, and other creatures.

You can conjure spells that freeze or damage all onscreen enemies, and you can smash stone idols to reveal recovery potions, extra lives, weapon power-ups, and more. The controls and collision detection could use some fine tuning, and the arcade version—Jaleco's *The Astyanax* from 1989—has richer graphics, but *Astyanax* is notable for its nifty (if unintentionally funny) *Ninja Gaiden*-like cut scenes. Speaking of the arcade game, this loosely adapted port has redesigned stages and enemies and a new storyline.

Notable Quotable:

"*Astyanax* didn't impress me much at all. While its heart is in the right place, the game just doesn't play or move well." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

Insider Insight: I was first introduced to *Astyanax* in the pages of the 1990 August/September issue of *Gameplayer's Strategy Guide to Nintendo Games*. I was just a kid and it really stood out to me. The graphics looked impressive with the game's larger-than-usual character sprites. It didn't hurt that there was also a two-page ad in the issue that had better pictures of the game than the article about it. The game made such an impression on me that I asked for and received it for my birthday that year. Since this was the first birthday that I celebrated while owning the NES this game has always been special to me.

Years later it became even more special to me because through it I met Dave Rivera—I was the first to correctly guess that it was his favorite NES game in a Facebook contest he held. I went to meet him in Houston at the newly opened Game Bros. video game store owned by Greg Honeycutt and Clint Dollins. I had been in the planning stages of a 24-hour Twitch charity stream. After meeting them they kindly allowed me to hold the event at their store. Through that stream I became involved with the Gaming4Guts annual charity event to help raise awareness and funds for Crohn's & Colitis research. I have helped organize this streaming event for the last several years and I'm not sure that I would be involved if it weren't for *Astyanax*. —John Trenbeath, Co-organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Athena

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: Micronics
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1987

In *Athena*, players guide the big-headed, poorly animated title character—the supposed Goddess of Wisdom—through Fant[illegible] World, which is populated with ladder[illegible]mb, obstacles to jump (or double ju[illegible]yer, oddly cartoonish monsters to kick (or otherwise destroy), brick walls to smash, and more. Pegasus wings enable Athena to fly, shell necklaces change her into a mermaid (for exploring the ocean depths), and she can grab a number of other useful items, including hourglasses, swords, billy clubs, magic sticks, weapon power-ups, helmets, shields, armor, and life flowers. *Athena* looks a lot like its arcade counterpart (SNK, 1986), but that's faint praise indeed. Marred by poor collision detection, unresponsive controls, bland graphics, cruddy sound effects, and weak weaponry, *Athena* gives platformers a bad name.

Notable Quotable:
"Although this game is reminiscent of *Karnov* in gameplay and layout, it has its own unique charm and daunting monsters. A major complaint: except for Medusa and Gabbys, the animation and design of the monsters is pretty pedestrian. The scenery is also boring." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

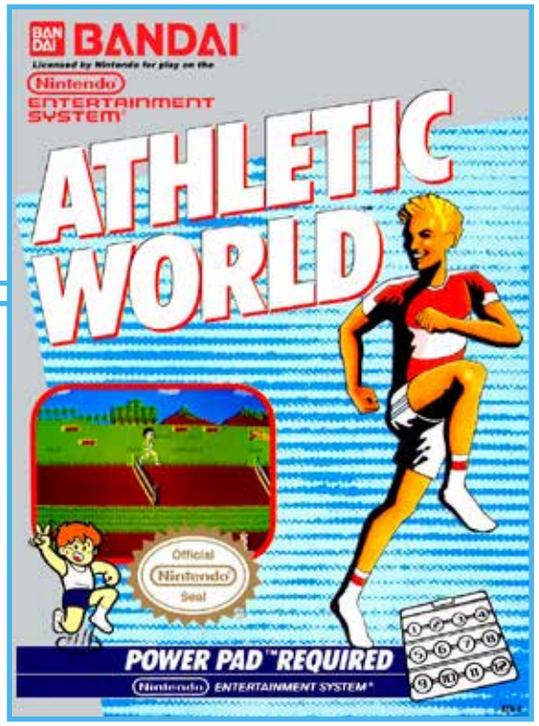
Notable Quotable:
"*Athena* has a lovely title screen with a nice anime-style picture of Athena's head . . . It's all downhill from there . . . Athena is drawn very badly. Her head is way too big and her body is straight up and down like a flagpole. The animation of her walk and jump is stiff and robotic, and when she swings a weapon it looks like she's trying to hit herself with it . . . The music does absolutely nothing to enhance the game or emote what's going on and sounds as though it's being played on a phonograph or out-of-tune music box. The sound effects are extremely loud and annoying . . . There is a definite lag between the time you press the button and when Athena actually jumps. The system of double-jumping is also very cumbersome . . . With a few exceptions, most weapons don't 'swing,' they just change size, meaning you have to be incredibly close to the enemies to use them . . . *Athena* is quite a hard game, but unfortunately it's all due to poor play control and the lack of a signal to tell you that Athena is taking hits . . . *Athena* is to 2D action side-scrollers what *Hydlide* was to RPGs." —Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The action of *Athena* is a total mess. Enemies are quick and aggressive, and unless you have the right items they're hard to fend off if more than one is attacking at the same time. There's no invincibility time after taking a hit, so a single brush-up can drain huge amounts of health—one of the very first enemies right at the beginning of the game can kill you outright, if you're not careful. Whenever equipped with a weapon, Athena holds it out right in front of her, but when she attacks, she just kind of flails it around, and there's no real reach to anything. The basic hammers and swords are extremely difficult to wield effectively, so you'd better find the more powerful items like the flails or the magic spells if you hope to survive." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

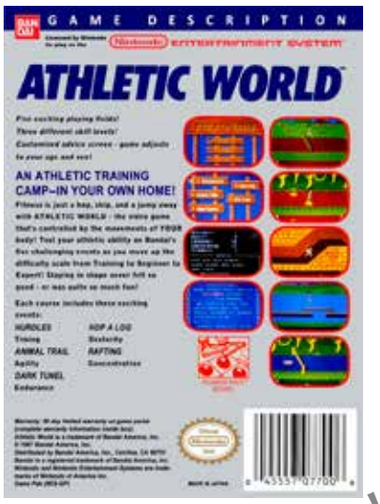
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Athletic World

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: TRY
GAME TYPE: Sports/Exercise, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



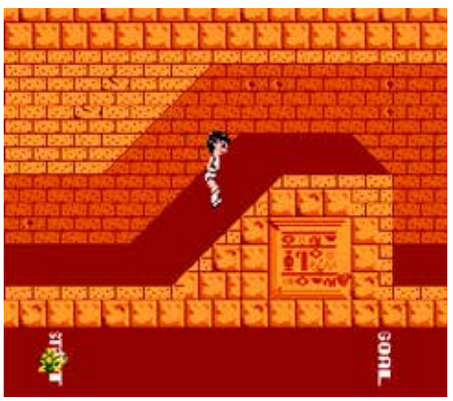
One of the relatively few video games that will give more than just your thumbs a workout, *Athletic World* was originally packaged with Bandai's Family Fun Fitness Pad, which is a large, dot-covered exercise mat that you run, walk, or jog on to control the on-screen action. The game is made up of five events: Hurdles, Animal Trail, Dark Tunnel, Hop-a-Log, and Rafting. The Hurdles event tests your eye-foot coordination by having you jump over hurdles as you run. Moles will interfere with your hurdling if you play the Expert Course. During the Animal Trail you must dodge animals as you run.



The Dark Tunnel is filled with slippery inclines and bats. (Bats appear in the Expert Course only.) You must really keep up your speed in the Dark Tunnel game, especially when approaching an incline. As the name indicates, the Hop-a-Log stage has you jumping from log to platform to log, trying not to slip off and fall in the water. In the Expert Course frogs are on hand to complicate matters. In the Rafting game you must run, jump, or drop to your knees to avoid logs and other obstacles (such as fish in the Expert Course). After the Family Fun Fitness Pad was on the market for a few months Nintendo bought the rights, removed it from stores, and then re-released it as the more famous Nintendo Power Pad. *World Class Track Meet*, which offered two-player support, replaced *Athletic World* as the pack-in game.

Notable Quotable:
"The game gets you moving and works pretty well with what was a new technology at the time, so I'll give it a 6 out of 10." —HeavyMetalGamingShow (YouTube)

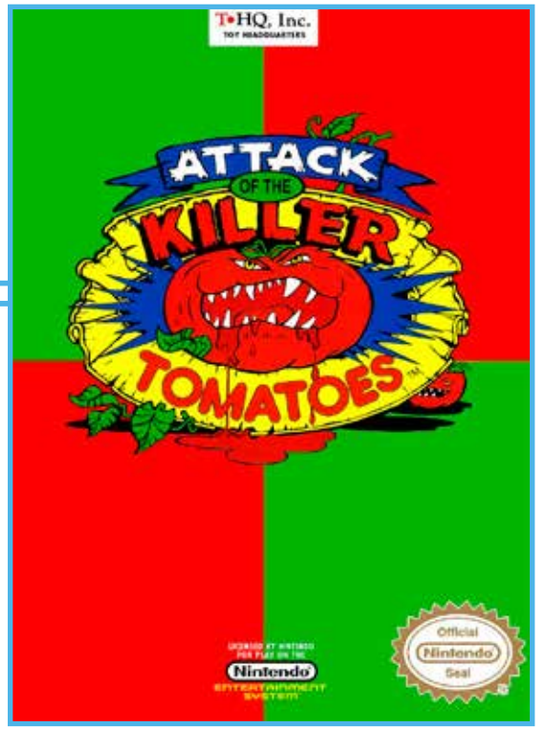
Notable Quotable:
"Despite the lack of depth and—depending on one's athletic prowess—quick completability of *Athletic World*, I still enjoyed my time with the game. Had it had a few more events, perhaps something other than mostly jumping and running, it would be looked upon more favorably today. If nothing else, the game serves as a welcome introduction to the Power Pad, a peripheral that paved the way for the *Dance Dance Revolution* series and the Wii Balance Board, among others. Long live superfluous peripherals!" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Attack of the Killer Tomatoes

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Attack of the Killer Tomatoes puts you in control of all-American boy Chad Finletter, who must run and jump through four monotonous stages, plus a fifth that appears after the credits have ended. Jump a tomato you must jump on it in the direct center, making for a frustrating central gameplay element, especially since there are no weapons. The buildings and city streets are nicely illustrated, and the running and jumping action is broken up somewhat by ladders to climb, conveyor belts to ride on, and other staples of the genre. Tomato bosses to battle include Zolton, Beefsteak, Mummoto, Ketcho, and Tomotcho, and the action begins on the streets of San Zucchini, so there is some food-based humor to consider. Your overall objective is to stop Dr. Gangrene from launching his Doomsday Tomato. Based on the 1991 cartoon series, which in turn was based on the 1978 B-movie semi-classic.

Notable Quotable:

"A below average platform game hurt by unreliable hit detection. The line between stomping a tomato and running into one is not clear, leading to an abundance of cheap deaths. The graphics are strong for the NES, featuring early attempts at lighting and shadow effects." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

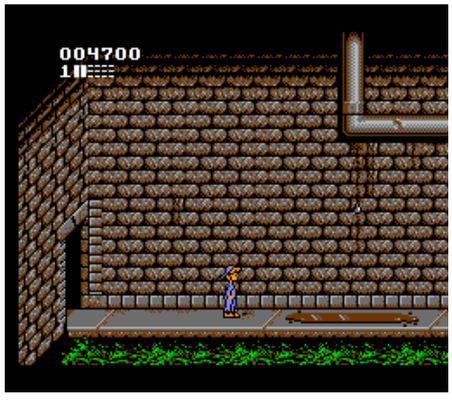
Insider Insight: A highlight of the 1978 film *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* is when the silence in a library is broken by a man who simply utters, "TO-MA-TO." Just the mention of the word sent people scrambling for their lives. Fast forward to 1991, a time when many gamers seemed to be having a similar reaction to the NES video game. But for me, between making my own movies about rubber chickens and spending weekends watching B movies on USA *Up All Night*, this game fit like a glove.

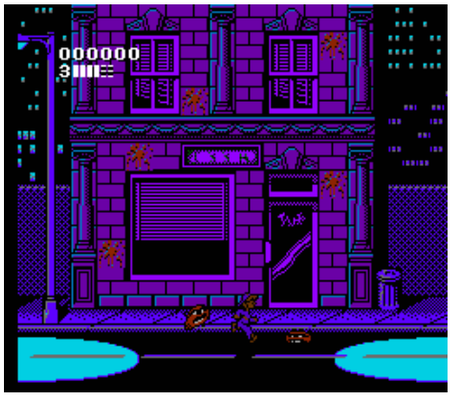
I discovered the cartridge at a friend's house. The NES sat on his bedroom dresser alongside a half-eaten pack of grape Big League Chew. Dirty clothes were stacked under his NES. The curtains were always closed. The air was thick. Sci-fi and horror VHS tapes dubbed off of Cinemax were scattered under my feet. But it was worth it. Controlling Chad Finletter was a true delight.

The look of the game was fantastic! The first level especially; the shades of blue splashing across the outline of the cityscape. John De Bello's 8-bit catchy theme song from the movie never sounded better, and the tomatoes didn't disappoint. As advertised, they were gooey, gushy, squishy, mushy, and rotten to the core.

This wasn't a great game by any means, but it was goofy and mindless fun. I'm still waiting for more games to be developed based on cult TV shows and movies. I mean, c'mon, who doesn't want to play *Sorority Babes in the Slime Bowl-O-Rama*? —Sean Tiedeman, filmmaker, director of *The King of Arcades*

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Baby Boomer

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams
DEVELOPER: Jim Meuer
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

A game with an unusual control method, the cleverly titled *Baby Boomer* has players using Nintendo's Zapper gun to help [illegible] make it through a series of hazards and eventually to his mother. While the baby crawls from left to right, players must shoot fireworks, spiders, ghosts, bats, and other obstacles while avoiding shooting gold nuggets, which the baby will gather for extra lives. Milk should be shot or the baby will get hungry, and a variety of items can be shot for extra points. Puzzle elements also come into play. For example, clouds can be shot to form ice bridges, and shooting valve handles can determine which pipes the baby crawls through. Shooting certain screen elements opens passageways. Hampered by bland graphics and lousy collision detection, this unlicensed oddity was Color Dreams' first game. Similar in control concept to the early black box NES game *Gumshoe*.

Notable Quotable:

"A game that takes the extremely simple light gun game formula—shoot bad guys before they hurt you—and manages to completely wreck it by trying to make it interesting, like painting an Aston Martin with a tiger-stripe pattern . . . The actual shooting action is mediocre at best and nothing too reprehensible, but having to shoot things while protecting a baby? Not much fun, because no one likes escort missions. Your success and failures should be your own, not dictated by the whims of your squishy charge as they wander into a floating pneumatic drill. On top of that it's smeared with dismal, simplistic graphics, small, uninteresting enemies, and occasional attempts to inject some 'wacky fun' that just feel forced and awkward, like the 'wha wha whaaa' ending . . . I haven't played every single NES Zapper game, but none of the ones I have played are nearly as frustrating as *Baby Boomer*." —VG Junk (retrovania-vgjunk.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight: I absolutely love weird and wacky light gun games, and *Baby Boomer* is about as weird and wacky as it gets. You help guide a baby, who is dead-set on getting himself into trouble, across a variety of levels that even include heaven and hell. Sounds like an interesting game, right? That's exactly why I was in a rush to get my own copy of the game after seeing a couple of YouTube reviewers cover it. Zapper games aren't often known for their great control, and this one is no exception. The first time I played it, I was frustrated with the higher degree of difficulty. Aiming and shooting the targets doesn't translate very well, and you'll find yourself accidently sending Baby to his untimely death quite often. To be perfectly honest that is the reason why I love this game so much.—"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

COPYRIGHT 1989 BY JIM MEUER
LICENSED BY COLOR DREAMS, INC
SCORE 00000000
BABY BOOMER
PULL TRIGGER OR PRESS START TO BEGIN
PLAY AS A TEAM! USE BOTH GUN AND CONTROLLER AT SAME TIME.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Back to the Future

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

Back to the Future, which hit theaters in 1985, is one of the slickest, most enjoyable films of its era. Unfortunately, the game that is loosely based on the movie falls far short of its progenitor. Players guide Marty McFly (played, of course, by Michael J. Fox in the film) up a vertically scrolling screen, collecting clocks while avoiding bees, hula hoop girls, trash cans, and other obstacles. McFly can throw bowling balls at enemies, grab skateboards that make him go faster (a countdown timer, represented by a family photo, is a major factor), and jump over manholes. Four different mini-games let McFly shoot milk shakes at bullies, block hearts from his mom, catch guitar notes, and drive up a road while maintaining a speed of 88 mph. The game, which takes place in four locations in Hill Valley (the cafe, school, dance hall, and courthouse), is playable, but it frequently ignores the plot of the movie. Plus it has a disappointing ending and crude graphics and sounds. Even so, *Paperboy* fans may enjoy the game to some small degree.

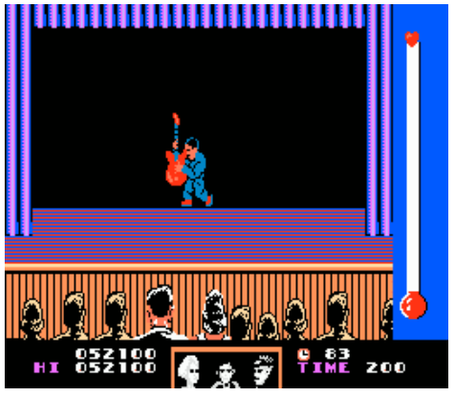
Notable Quotable:

"*Back to the Future* screams of a quick cash-in title with little thought put into the gameplay. Almost every part of it is dull, and the references to the movie are so shoehorned in that it's hard not to think the license was slapped onto another game at the last minute!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"Marty bears no resemblance to the film's main character. Sure, this was NES and developers could only do so much, but when the character's red life vest and brown hair are replaced with a sleeveless black shirt and black hair you get the impression they didn't even try . . . Marty's standard jump is completely useless. If you try to jump over an enemy or obstacle you just smack right into it, leaving you wondering why the jump was even included . . . Perhaps the worst bit of all is the music, which is just an obnoxious, sporadic loop of noise that repeats throughout the majority of the game . . .should rank among the worst licensed games ever made, up there with LJN's own *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *Bill & Ted's Excellent Video Game Adventure*." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: I didn't see *Back to the Future* as a kid, but my friend Joey was a big fan. He told me it had a flying car, time travel, and all sorts of other great stuff, so naturally I was intrigued. One summer day Joey's mom gave us permission to walk to the video store and rent a game, and when we got there, his eyes lit up at the sight of the *Back to the Future* video game. Based on how cool he told me the movie was, we decided that was our game. We grabbed it and headed back to his house, talking the whole way home about how awesome it was going to be. Once we turned it on we were bombarded with grating music, hideous gameplay that didn't involve so much as a whiff of a flying car, and girls with hula hoops throwing balls at our heads. It was easily the worst video game we had ever played. We marched it right back to the video store and demanded a refund, but they said no. So we were stuck in the heat, with no new games to play, and nothing but our seething hatred for *Back to the Future* to entertain us. I despise that game to this day. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

Back to the Future Part II & III

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

It's a movie-licensed title, and it was published by LJN, so it should come as no surprise that *Back to the Future Part II & III* is hardly a gold-star game. It is something of a (very) poor man's *Super Mario Bros.*—complete with similar platforms and enemies that look like Spiny and Goomba—but it adds a number of frustrating complications, including tricky puzzles. For example, planting an acorn in 1955 produces a climbable tree in 1985. In addition to running, throwing projectiles, and jumping on platforms and on top of enemies, players must look for and enter rooms that contain non-scrolling, ladder-based mini-games involving collecting items within a time limit while avoiding cacti, quicksand, guitars, and other obstacles. Beating a mini-game grants players an object that must be taken to the correct puzzle room, wherein waits a word scramble mini-game. *Back to the Future Part II & III* follows, to some degree, the plots of the 1989/1990 feature films, including such elements as Marty traveling through time and Biff stealing an old sports almanac.

Memories: In the summer of 1990, when I was working as assistant manager at Lone Star Comics, a movie rep came by and gave the manager of the store and me free passes to a *Back to the Future* movie marathon, with all three films screening back-to-back at a local theater. I already loved the original film, and while the sequels aren't pitch perfect like the first movie, it was a super fun Saturday as we sat in the darkness, thrilling to the adventures of Marty McFly and consuming our weight in popcorn, candy, and soda. Sadly, spending a day playing the NES games would be much more of a chore than anything resembling true entertainment.

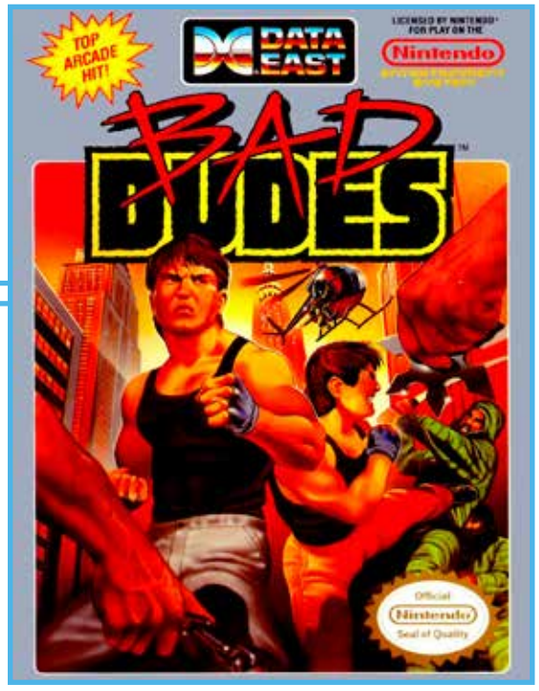
Notable Quotable:
"If you look past the fact it has little to do with the movies on which it's based, *Back to the Future Part II & III* is a decent *Super Mario Bros.* rip-off. What happens in the game doesn't make much sense (the alternate 1985 is filled with mutant snails and spiky-shelled turtles), but the controls are reasonably tight and the visuals are passable." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"I guess you can chalk walking hamburgers with eyes and flying ghost faces up to the disruption of the time continuum . . . The enemies will change their look based on the time period, but retain their behavior, so the stout, walking hamburger becomes a stout, walking trash can . . .offers more gameplay than the original and is barely a better game . . .the whole plot is more like a college prank than anything particularly devious . . .comes off like a frustrating combination of *Mario* and *Metroid*. The treasure hunt aspect is mostly an excuse to move you through the levels and force you to look in obscure places and play average minigames . . . It has more thought put into it than the typical quickie action scroller but is still an overall failure." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bad Dudes

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Data East
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



Adapted from the 1988 Data East arcade game called *Bad Dudes vs. Dragon Ninja*, *Bad Dudes* for the NES is a button masher suffering from flickering graphics, choppy controls, poor voice effects ("I [illegible]!") and the lack of a two-player simultaneous mode. The game, famous for its campy storyline in which ninjas have kidnapped the president, plays like a poor man's *Double Dragon*, with gamers walking, jumping, punching, and kicking their way through seven levels (City, Big Rig, Sewer, Forest, Freight Train, Cave, and Factory) filled with mindless ninjas, plus some dogs, samurai, and super warriors. You battle in alleyways and sewers, around waterways, on moving trucks and other locations, and there are three weapons you can use: knives, nunchuks, and shurikens. President Ronnie (based on Ronald Reagan) from the arcade version has been replaced with a man resembling George H. W. Bush, who was president at the time of the NES release. You can play alone or team up with a friend for co-op combat.

Notable Quotable:

"Another *Double Dragon* clone. While the game is challenging, it is hampered with a not-so-smooth jerky player movement that gets annoying after a while and detracts from the overall gameplay. Nothing special, just another average action game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Stunning graphics and rousing theme music are hallmarks of *Bad Dudes*. The characters are extremely realistic looking and the animation is flawless. Unlike many fighting games of this type, *Bad Dudes* isn't all reflexes. Beating the Super Warriors on each level and staying alive long enough to see the end of the game takes strategy. And practice *does* pay off . . .still one of my favorite combat games." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Insider Insight: I love *Bad Dudes*! Everything about this game just brings me back to how cheesy and fantastic it truly is. In high school we would discuss how ridiculous this game was, constantly talking about the hilarious introduction to the game and story. I mean, come on! The president was kidnapped by Ninjas!? Not to mention the guy telling you all about it looks like Duke Nukem.

This game is forever a favorite in my NES library. To this day, I always bring up how horribly '80s it is. My co-worker Sean refuses to even attempt to try this game or the arcade version because I have brought it up so much in retro gaming conversations. It's not the greatest game I've ever played, but it is definitely the most memorable, and when my high school friends and I do manage to get together it always gets brought up. Always! —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate, blogger at raysback-logblog.wordpress.com

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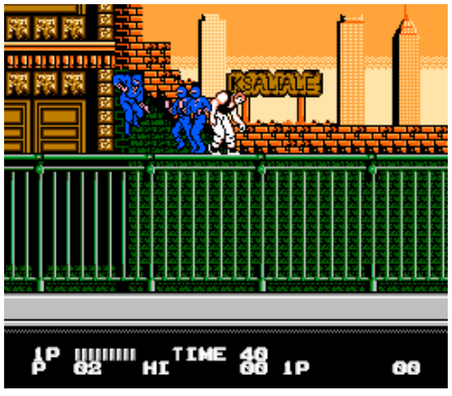
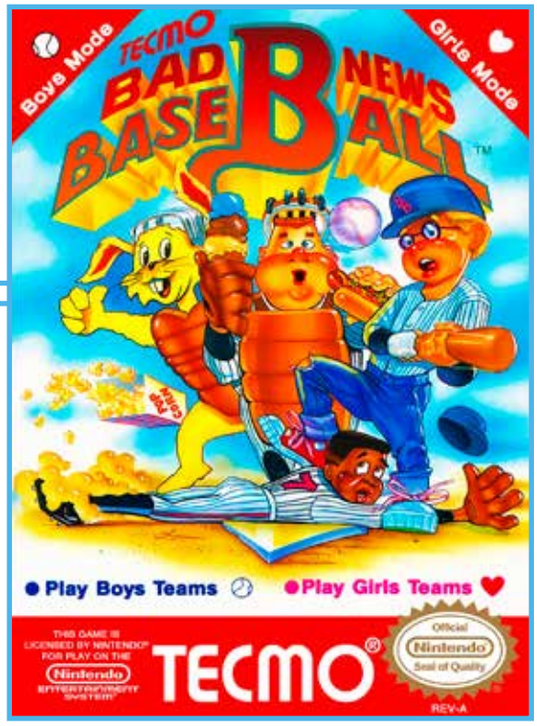


Bad News Baseball

PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: Tecmo
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



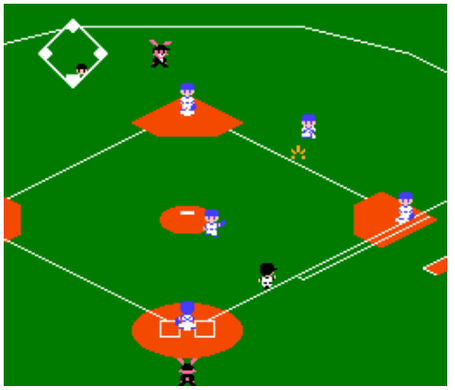
Featuring a title inspired by the *Bad News Bears* motion picture from 1976, *Bad News Baseball* is a fun, fast paced baseball game that appears to have been made with younger players in mind, but that doesn't mean it's not a substantive experience. Gamers can bunt, pick runners off bases, change the batting order and field positions, send in pinch hitters, decide on the starting pitcher, jump and dive for balls, and select their starting line-up from a roster of (fictional) players ranked according to such categories as fielding ability, running strength, arm strength, and home run hitting ability. Pitchers, who are ranked by stamina and ERA, can throw curve balls, screwballs, forkballs, and change-ups. What makes *Bad News Baseball* kid friendly are cute animations, voice effects, juvenile players (boys *and* girls), bunny rabbit umpires, and close-up cutscenes after certain big or close plays. The only bad news here is if you like video baseball but don't own this entertaining game.

Notable Quotable:
"I wish the computer was a little less amazing. It hit everything I threw at it. . . It doesn't always hit it well, but it would be nice to land a strike every now and again. It's also a little challenging to maneuver one's outfield players when the computer hits a ball out there, but it doesn't take away from the overall fun of the game." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:
"This is a pretty darn fun baseball game. The gameplay is great, and only *Baseball Stars* is superior. The theme is a little strange; it must have been marketed for kids originally. The umps are rabbits! Although there aren't any real players or teams, there are a lot of features." —NES Archives (formerly at nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Simple controls, whimsical graphics, and a looping musical theme that really gets on your nerves after a while . . . Comical animations include players that slam their bats in disgust or pass out on the field upon being thrown out . . .excellent playability. The controls are so natural that I never had to consult the manual, and there's just the right number of foul balls. Heck, you can play an entire game in about 15 minutes. It's not the most realistic baseball title for the NES, but *Bad News Baseball* is hard to beat in terms of pure entertainment value." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

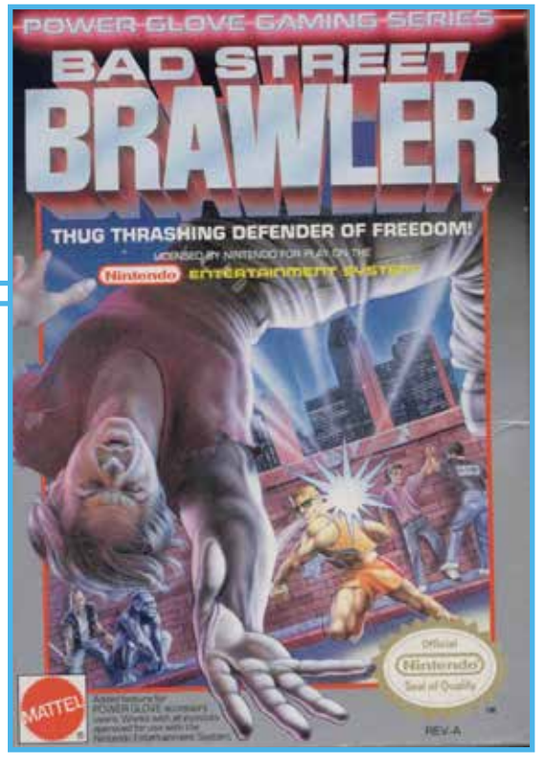
Notable Quotable:
"Different themes play for different teams . . . The opening theme of the game is great, too. Sound effects are very good, from the crack of the bat, to the sound of dirt being kicked up when you slide, to the cheer of the crowd for hitting home runs . . . Some teams you'll dominate, and you won't be able to stop hitting homers or getting hits. Other times you'll get dominated, as your club won't be able to get anything going . . .a fast, addictive NES baseball game. It has just enough 'extras' in gameplay to make it (way) better than games like *R.B.I. Baseball* or *Major League Baseball*, but not too many added features that ruin the gameplay by making things too complicated . . . Everything controls well, and there is certainly strategy in rotating your pitchers, using pinch hitters, and looking at players' stats." —Obscure Video Games (obscurevideogames.com)



SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Bad Street Brawler

PUBLISHER: Mattel
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989



Essentially an enhanced remake of *Bop'n Rumble* for the Commodore 64, *Bad Street Brawler* has players guiding a ye[illegible]ired former punk rocker and current m[illegible]tist named Duke Davis through five areas (City Park, Streets, Docks, City Center, and Railroad Yard), using a variety of moves (drop kick, punch, head butt, ear twist, and the like) to battle a cartoonish assortment of boxers, gorillas, punks, bulldogs, bikers, basketball players, circus muscle men, and other enemies. There are 15 different fighting moves (some of which will tickle your funny bone), but you can only use three per level. As in the vastly superior *Double Dragon*, *Bad Street Brawler* lets players grab weapons from certain enemies, but *Brawler* makes players throw the weapons in the trash (teaching an invaluable lesson, no doubt). In addition, Duke, unlike the boys from *Double Dragon*, is constrained to a single plane of movement. With its purple-and-green dayglo coloring the game screams "1980s." Along with *Super Glove Ball*, *Bad Street Brawler* was one of only two games designed specifically for the ill-fated and infamous Nintendo Power Glove, but it will also work with the standard controller.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

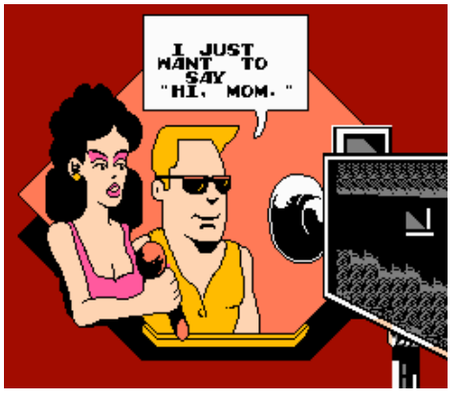
"The gameplay is unbelievably repetitive, with nothing to break up the action, and getting through all 15 stages is a test of endurance. The time limit in each level is very short, so you'll find yourself rushing through rather than enjoying the beat-'em-up action. Using the Power Glove is very unresponsive, and your character moves too fast, so you can't really pull off precise attacks . . .a bad first showcase for the Power Glove, and while you'll be forced to reach for a standard controller just to make it playable, you will still find yourself getting bored very quickly." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"I remember getting this game as a gift when I was a kid and wanting it to be good, but it really, really sucks. The music is . . .so repetitive, and the sound effects are so annoying that it's better to play with the sound muted. I hate the theme song and it gets stuck in my head for some reason! The graphics are cheesy and have very little detail. The *Flintstones*-type background of each level looks like it took five minutes to develop. Even the colors used are ugly . . . I guess the only thing that would have made this crappy game a little more fun to play is if two people could actually play it at the same time. No dice." —Classic Games Blog (classicgamesblog.com)

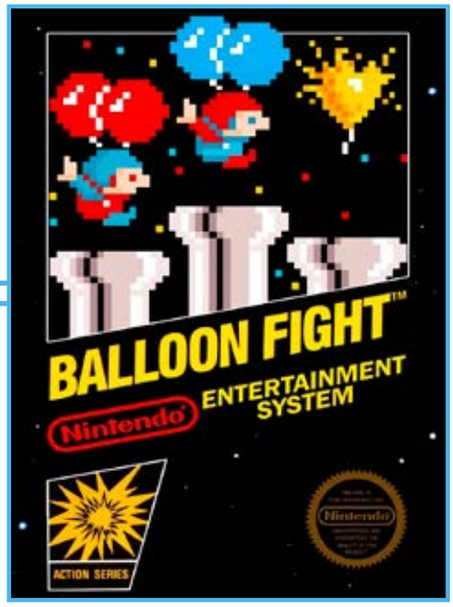
Notable Quotable:

"Oddly, the game manual makes no mention of the Glove. The only hint to its Glove-savvy is on the box cover. Stranger still is the game manual's visual depiction of Duke's moves, but it doesn't give any indication of how to replicate them on the NES controller . . . It seems as if this Mattel game was created to induce more sales of the Power Glove . . . Once you master the three available moves and take to the mean streets, you may notice the control isn't too good with the [standard] NES controller. Even simple things like shifting direction show lag . . .the sort of game that looks awesome until you actually begin playing the game. Its weaknesses become very apparent. Poor control, silly moves, and awful outfit. Aside from being a Power Glove game it's not too engaging." —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)



Balloon Fight

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1986



A game that feels more akin to a homage than a rip-off, *Balloon Fight* plays a lot like the coin-op classic *Joust* (which was ported to the NES), but replaces the ostrich-mounted knights' players control with balloonists who fly by flapping their arms. You tap the button to gain altitude and your character floats across the non-scrolling playfield on two screens. The objective is to fly around, bumping enemies from above (while avoiding being bumped into from below), thereby popping their balloon(s) and sending them parachuting downward. Flying too close to the water puts players in danger of getting eaten by a fish, which is similar to the Troll of the Lava Pits in *Joust*. If it takes too long to defeat all the enemies a lightning storm will occur. Hitting the enemy again on his way down makes him drop into the water below. Going it alone to see how many screens you can finish is fun, but battling a second gamer while doing the same is even more enjoyable. Like its coin-op counterpart (Nintendo, 1984), *Balloon Fight* contains a special side-scrolling mode where players float along, popping balloons while avoiding lightning, making a great (if largely unoriginal) game even better. An excellent early release for the console.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are simple, with black backgrounds and foregrounds that stand out well. Player characters look very different to enemies, so keeping track of everyone is easy. Animations are also simple, and watching characters flap their arms around frantically is a lot of fun. *Balloon Fight* may not be eye candy, but the graphics are clear and serve their purpose well. The audio is as frenzied as the gameplay, as brief tunes are triggered by different events while the audio outside of these events is comprised of a constant rapid succession of random high-pitched notes. It sounds very arcade-like and complements this type of game nicely . . . There is no sense of progression, since when the game is over you must start from the beginning again. This is acceptable, but it means that you probably won't spend more than a couple of attempts in one sitting. A *Balloon Fight* remake that has a story mode where your progression is saved would be fantastic . . .a classic Nintendo game that is still a lot of fun." —A. J. Maciejewski (videochums.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: I never owned *Balloon Fight* as a kid. It didn't even enter my consciousness until I was in my 30s. Little did I know when I bought it that it would be a part of one of the greatest weekends of my life.

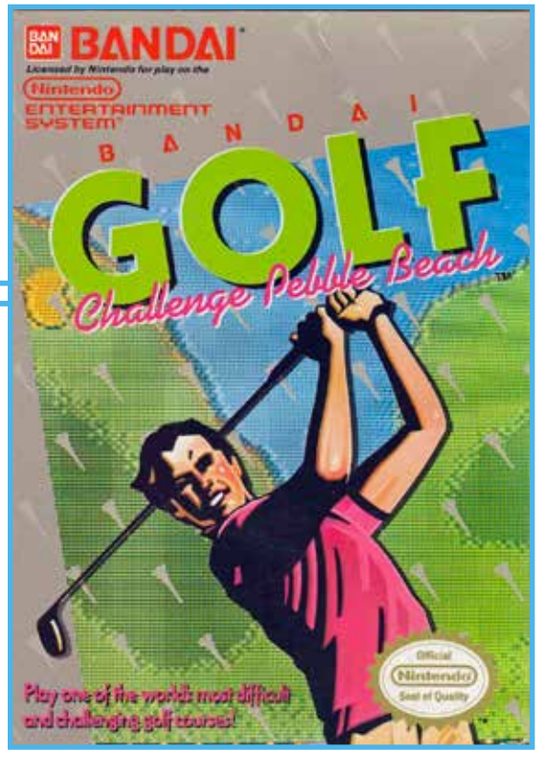
Michelle and I had been dating and gaming together competitively (as Team Mayh3m) for nearly four years, and with our anniversary approaching I decided to make a very important purchase. Two months later the day had arrived.

After enjoying an incredible anniversary dinner at our favorite local Italian restaurant we headed home for the gift exchange. Needless to say, I was doing my best to hide my anticipation as I handed her the gift bag. She reached in and pulled out a boxed Atari Flashback 5 console. I asked her to open it, which she did, only to reveal a boxed Luigi-themed Wii Remote. Pleased but a little confused by the gift within a gift, she humored me one last time when I asked her to hand me the Wii Remote box. I opened it up and pulled out a ring box. I presented the ring to her and proceeded to pop the question. After recovering from a barrage of emotions she replied with an emphatic, "Of course!"

The next day, as the newly minted engaged couple, we decided to live stream our latest attempts to set a two-player cooperative high score world record for *Balloon Fight* on Twitch. We had been working on building and refining our play strategies for some time and had been on the cusp of hitting our desired mark of at least 2.5 million points on several prior occasions. It turned out that all we needed to do to seal the deal was to get engaged, as we achieved a score of 2,975,250 points that would later end up being published in the 2017 *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition*. —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one-half of Team Mayh3m, and featured in the *Nintendo Quest* documentary.

Bandai Golf: Challenge Pebble Beach

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989



Played on an 18-hole course riddled with rises, trees, patches of thick grass (called roughs), bunkers, slopes, and water hazards along the seaside, *Bandai Golf: Challenge Pebble Beach* is a traditional golf game for one or two players with a built-in difficulty level feature allowing you to input your handicap and choose between teeing off from the back tee or the regular tee. You must also consider the direction and speed of the wind, and depending on the club and shot you choose, control the ball's flight, direction, and spin. Named after the famous coastal golf course in California, *Challenge Pebble Beach* gives gamers a cross-sectional and bird's-eye view of each hole, along with two different close-ups of the greens and their surroundings.

Notable Quotable:
"I really enjoy playing this game. I realize it is limited to one course, but man, what a course! The loving translation makes this a real joy for a golf fan. The learning curve is minimal, and the fast and loose action makes for a quick, fun round of golf. The amount of forgiveness and leniency do make it a bit easy, but getting under par is no guarantee! I play *Bandai Golf: Challenge Pebble Beach* a lot. There are a few minor quibbles that keep it from being perfect, but it is one of my favorite NES golf games." —The Electric Frankfurter (electricfrankfurter.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:
"One of the first attempts to recreate a real golf course in digital form . . .a very good recreation of the course . . .everything else about the game is crap . . . The aiming cursor tended to jump, making precise aiming needlessly difficult. The three-click swing was royally botched. The meter speeds up and slows down almost at random. Worse, there's no consistency at all. There were times where being way off on the third click yielded better shots than hitting it dead-on . . .wonky putting controls . . . There were points where the ball landed on a major downhill slope but barely rolled . . . The options are absolutely pathetic even for the time . . . *PGA Golf* on the Intellivision could provide four players with shared controllers; there's no excuse for this one to be limited to two players . . . The visuals aren't even that impressive for the era . . . *Chip Shot* on the Intellivision had more visual flair." —Adam Wallace (www.defunctgames.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bandit Kings of Ancient China

PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Koei
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–7 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

KOEI
BEST SELLER IN JAPAN
BANDIT KINGS OF ANCIENT CHINA
3 Megabit Cartridge
A 3 Megabit ROM cartridge with two 64 Kilobit Random Access Memory so you can save your game while you're ahead!
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
Strategy Game Series

The type of deep strategy game that Koei fans relish, *Bandit Kings of Ancient China* takes place at the dawn of the twelfth century, when the evil, power-hungry Gao Qui has seized all imperial authority. As a bandit leader, it is up to the player (and up to six friends) to wage war against Gao Qui and his soldiers. This relatively complex process includes fighting battles on a hexagonal playfield; deploying and instructing units across mountains, ice, planes, lakes, castles, and other terrain; using four types of attacks (melee, archery, magic, and duel); trading fur for gold; building towns; promoting agriculture; recruiting, imprisoning, exiling, and executing prisoners; dealing with such hindrances and special events as taxes, aging, snowstorms, riots, and epidemics; battling wild beasts to increase popularity; and much more. Players are ranked according to strength, dexterity, wisdom, integrity, mercy, courage, and other attributes. Similar Koei games include *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Nobunaga's Ambition*, and *Genghis Khan*.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

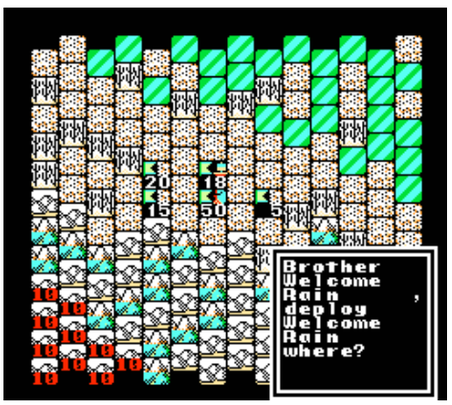
"Some players will find the pace slow compared to more action-oriented games while others will enjoy the depth, involvement, and attention to detail." —*Nintendo Power* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"An involved game . . .countless details and stats . . .extremely in-depth and complex . . .runs kind of slow, but does have a lot of elements that work pretty well together for a turn-based strategy style game." —HeavyMetalGamingShow (YouTube)

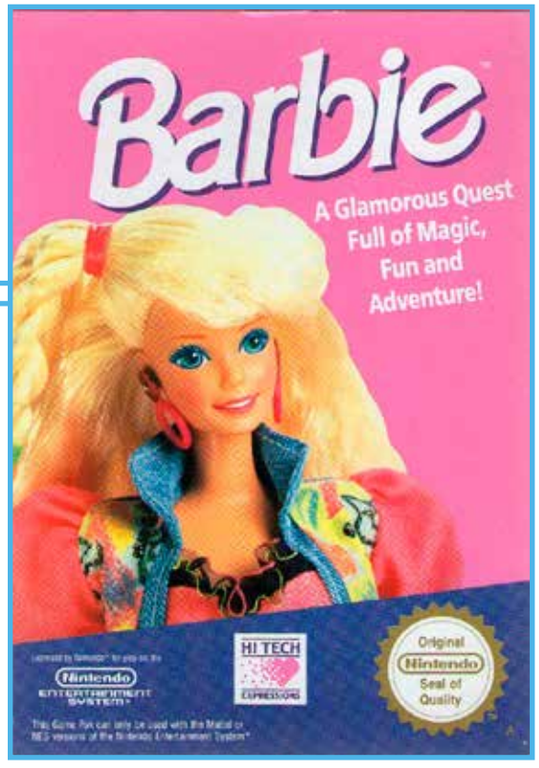
Notable Quotable:

"*Bandit Kings of Ancient China* is a real rarity in the NES library, and one that every experienced player and RPG fan needs to check out. If you're interested in retro gaming but lean more towards war games this is certainly a title for you, and a nice step into the world of Koei . . .an impressive title in consideration of the detail involved and the amount of challenge, but it's definitely not a game for the less experienced . . . If you have the guts to try, make sure you take your time, as you pretty much receive a PhD by proxy after completing it." —Game Freaks 365 (gamefreaks365.com)



Barbie

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



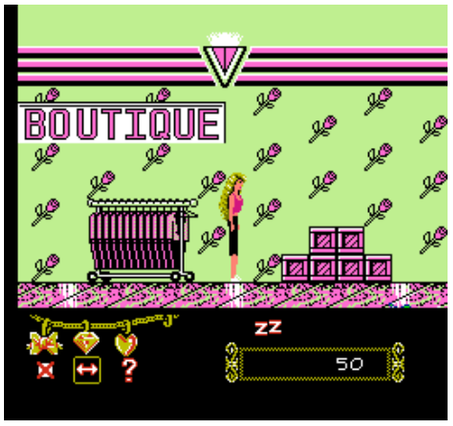
Recommended for young girls and anyone else who enjoys Barbies and simple platformers, this game finds the iconic doll dreaming that she's been invited to the Fantasy Ball, but she's got nothing to wear. To help her solve her sartorial dilemma, you guide her on a quest through three fantasy worlds: Mall World, Underwater World, and 50's Soda Pop World. Barbie walks from left to right, collecting items (including coins and gold records), jumping on platforms, and dodging and jumping over such obstacles as tennis balls, beach balls, water spouts, moving hats, giant flying french fries, and straw-shooting shakes. She also swims underwater as a mermaid, dodging turtles, jellyfish, falling shells, and other enemies and obstacles while searching for sunken pearls. In each area Barbie can use charms on her bracelet, as well as hidden charms. She can throw the charms at enemies and use them to have animal friends help her solve simple puzzles. For example, she can throw a charm to a dog to have him retrieve a bouncing tennis ball that is blocking her path. In one adorable scene she throws a bunch of charms at a box of walking popcorn to collect a gold record. Charms can also make her invincible and encircle her in a protective bubble. A cute, slow, agreeable game.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"*Barbie* fans might appreciate it, but I doubt it—the actual doll and your own imagination could produce more fun." —*N-Force* (October 1992)

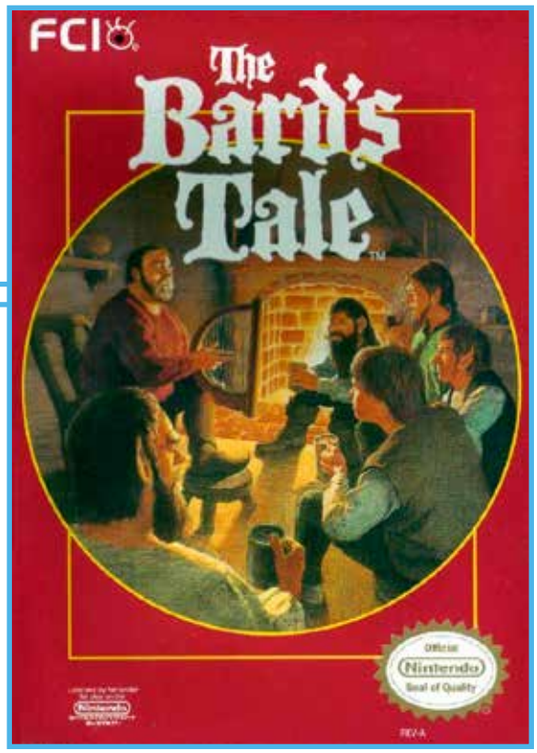
Notable Quotable:
"Much more interesting than you'd probably think . . .quite a bit going on in this little platformer . . .a lot of variety, tons of secrets, some areas that take a bit of practice, bosses that will sometimes actually get your blood moving, and some surprisingly awesome story screens . . . Sure, it's not the greatest platformer, but for something made for little girls, it really manages to stand out in a unique way." —Game Freaks 365 (gamefreaks365.com)

Insider Insight: *Barbie* on the NES is one of my guilty pleasures. I'm not going to lie—while growing up I played Barbies with my younger sister, so of course we played the video games as well. She owned the Game Boy version, which is similar to the NES rendition. As with most games when I was a kid, my nostalgia comes from renting and experiencing the best and worst of this game. It's a neat little platformer that at times feels a bit floaty, but is still enjoyable. I won't confirm or deny whether I hogged the controller, meaning my sister had to be content playing the Game Boy version most of the time. *Barbie* has you playing through her dreams, but those dreams are essentially nightmares, as they are full of scary things like killer fish, floating neck ties, and shoes that move on their own—I don't remember these things being a part of any Barbie Dream Home. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality



The Bard's Tale

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Atelier Double
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Years ago, a malevolent mage named Mangar the Dark unleashed monsters in the city of Skara Brae, and you and your party must seek out and destroy these creatures. *The Bard's Tale* is a scaled down (smaller with fewer dungeons) port of Electronic Arts' *Wizardry*-influenced computer game from 1985, which was titled *Tales of the Unknown, Volume I: The Bard's Tale*. In traditional dungeon crawler fashion, players explore maze-like areas (a wine cellar, sewers, towers, and a castle) to find treasure and battle monsters to gain experience and to level up a party of six characters consisting of wizards, warriors, hunters, bards, sorcerers, and the like. Fights are text-based, and actions are initiated by selecting from such commands as guard, cast, use item, equip, conjure, fight, run, talk, Bard song, and attack. Two views of the action run concurrently: overhead and first-person (pseudo-3D). The pubs in this kid-friendly NES version sell root beer and grape juice instead of beer and wine.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"This game was my pride and joy when I was a child . . . I must have played through it a dozen times . . .if you're the type of person that is into old school RPGs and D&D then *The Bard's Tale* is the game for you. It's epic beyond reason, and continues to this day to be one of my favorite RPGs. Classic Tunes, great enemies, great dungeon design, and all this back in the late '80s." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I personally couldn't get much mileage out of this game. Once I was able to grind my way up to being able to easily survive the overworld, surviving the cellar was still difficult. On top of it all, even when you are defeating these monsters, you hardly got any experience points that sufficiently allowed you to level up. I was able to survive enough to see the third floor, but that's as far as I got. After that the game gradually became less fun—so much so that I simply stopped playing after a while. Another gripe I have about this game is the fact that the menu system is extremely convoluted. To do much of anything you had to go through menu after menu after menu just to, say, give money from one character to another." —Drew Wilson (www.freezenet.ca)

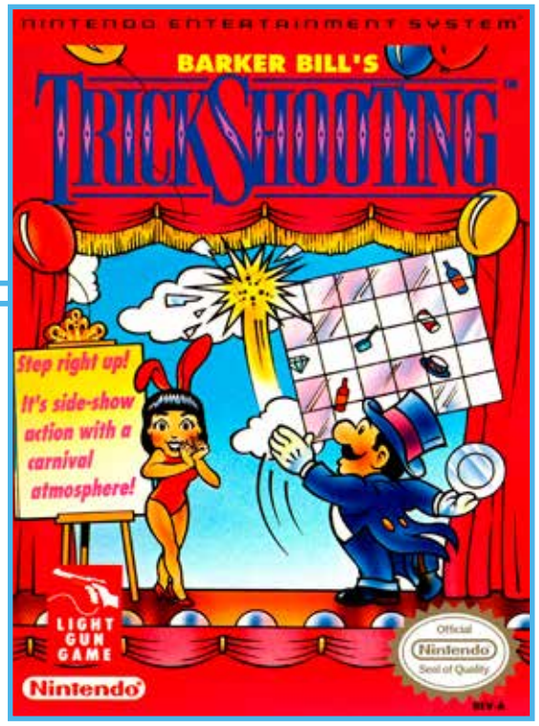
Notable Quotable:

"In battle the graphics were on par with most NES titles. All you see is the enemies up against a black screen. That's it. The creatures had a fair amount of detail, and there was a bit of variety . . . Each dungeon had its own little theme song to go along with it, adding some variety to the game . . . There was a beep for making selections and a noise or two for attacks, but that's it . . . The tale told in *TBT* gives new meaning to the term substandard. There are many key story elements that are just missing . . .none of your characters have any identity . . . You meet some shopkeepers, a heretic, a blue dragon, and a few bosses with one line . . .the only reason for you to be doing all this is to beat the evil boss. I think that plot ranks just below save the princess." —RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)

Here is a monster!
AC HP MP
Oleg 10 12 0 Warrior
Afgxs 10 9 11 Wizard
FFFFFF 10 14 0 Warrior
Agqqquqmnj 10DEAD 0 Warrior
Xqyxlj 10DEAD 14 Sorcerer
Gebhrrx 10DEAD 0 Warrior

Barker Bill's Trick Shooting

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



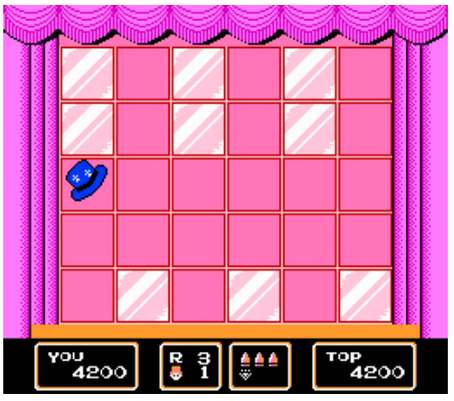
NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
BARKER BILL'S
TRICK SHOOTING
Barker Bill is your host. Join him and assistant Tricksie for arcade-style Trick Shooting!
LIGHT GUN
Nintendo

Barker Bill's Trick Shooting is a lesser known game than such early NES light gun shooters as *Duck Hunt* and *Hogan's Alley*, but it is a more colorful, more versatile, more enjoyable game. Brandishing the Nintendo Zapper, you take aim and fire at various targets through four different areas: Balloon Saloon (shoot balloons before they reach the top of the screen); Flying Saucers (shoot saucers that a man and his assistant throw into the air); Window Pains (shoot falling items through open windows); and Fun Follies (cycle through the previous events). Fun Follies also includes Trixie's Shot (shoot coins a dancing woman holds out) and Bill's Thrills (shoot items before they fall on a woman's head). Longtime Nintendo fans will recognize the laughing dog from *Duck Hunt*, who pops up in Balloon Saloon. You're not supposed to shoot him but you probably will. On purpose.

Memories: When I got my NES for Christmas in 1987, *Duck Hunt* was an early favorite, and I eagerly picked up *Hogan's Alley* right away because I loved it in the arcades. I played the heck out of each game to the point of getting burned out on the Zapper gun, so I was excited when *Barker Bill*'s came along to mix things up. It wasn't revolutionary, but it was different.

Notable Quotable:
"It's a simple, straightforward game. I could spend a lot of time playing this. We'll give it an extra thumbs up for letting us shoot the *Duck Hunt* dog." —HeavyMetalGamingShow (YouTube)

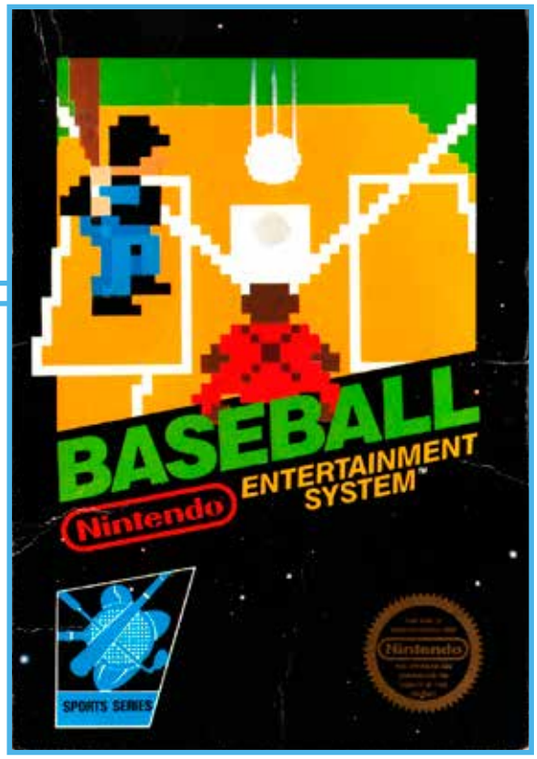
Notable Quotable:
"It's basic, but I like that the balloons move at different speeds, as it forces rapid decisions in terms of which one to hit next . . . The simple, yet genius part is that you gain more points the closer the saucer is to landing; this adds a fun risk-reward element and basically makes you gamble for a high score . . . The items fall at varying speeds, which challenges your timing, and having barriers (that change location in each round) is a fantastic idea to test your accuracy . . .doesn't have a ton of content, but it's still an enjoyable carnival game with great controls and well-thought-out modes." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Baseball

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1985

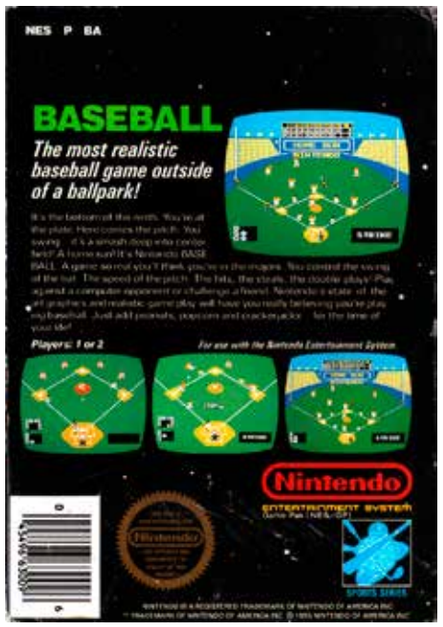


The first baseball game for the console, this NES launch title lacks a season mode, but it does include stealing, hit and run, bunts, and tag-ups. The computer controls fielding, meaning the defense only has to worry about pitching and throwing the ball to the proper base. Batting and pitching require the simple press of a button, but the control pad can be used to vary the speed and direction of pitches, which include fast, regular, curve, slow, and screwball. The six teams in *Baseball* are as generic as the title and the game itself, which has an overhead/slightly angled view of the diamond. As in many sports video games the two-player mode is more fun than playing solo.

Memories: For many video game fans too young to remember *Home Run* for the Atari 2600 or *Major League Baseball* for the Intellivision, *Baseball* for the NES was their first video version of the sport. As a kid my favorite was *Baseball!* for the Odyssey2. Although I can objectively look at its flaws and shortcomings now, I loved its simplicity and played it for hours and hours with my cousin Marti on her black-and-white TV set. People nostalgic for *Baseball* on the NES would have to overlook plenty of flaws as well.

Notable Quotable:
"Control has been deliberately simplified . . .everything is very slow . . . The graphics are also very weak, with blocky and badly defined players . . . The animation isn't very good either . . . Ardent baseball fans will doubtless glean some enjoyment out of this, but I'd personally wait for a better version of the sport to be released before rushing out with my dosh." —*Computer and Video Games* (April 1989)

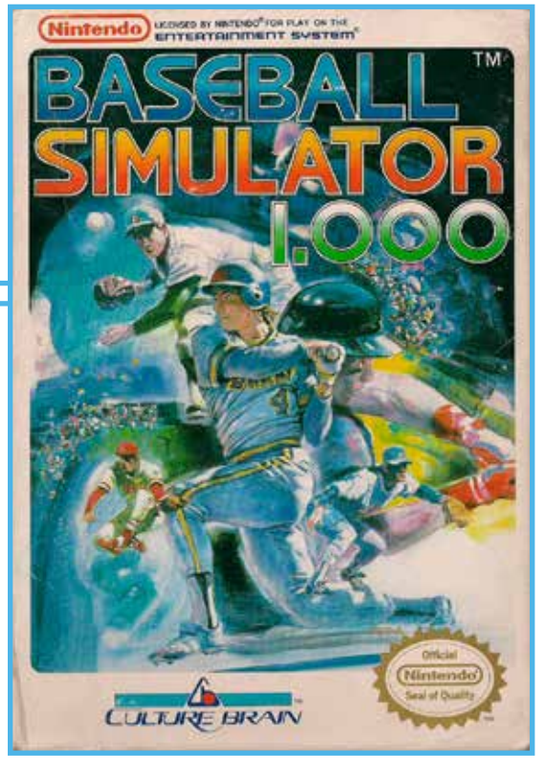
Notable Quotable:
"I thought this early Nintendo title would deliver some fun old-school action, but its gameplay turned out to be atrocious. I like the idea of viewing the entire field on one screen (as in Atari 5200 *RealSports Baseball*) with a separate screen for the pitcher/batter duel. The ball movement is smooth enough, but the fielders are painfully slow and choppy. Much of the fielding appears to be computer controlled, and it's all too common for outfielders to throw out runners headed to first. *Baseball*'s sound effects are practically nonexistent and so is the fun." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

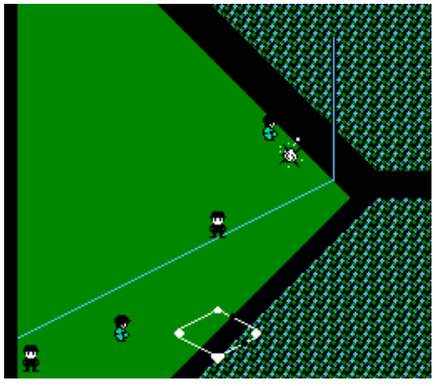


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Baseball Simulator 1.000

PUBLISHER: Culture Brain
DEVELOPER: Culture Brain
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1–6 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990





Futuristic and fun, *Baseball Simulator 1.000* offers solid, fast paced gameplay and lots of features, including seasonal play (30, 60, or 165 games), full editing for up to six teams, pinch hitters, pick-offs, the shifting of fielders, substitutions, six different stadiums, and stats you can save via battery backup. What truly sets the game apart from others is the zany, laugh-inducing fun of Ultra Play mode, which allows players to jump super high, throw pitches that disappear or speed up in mid-air, hit balls that explode or knock out the fielder, and more. The perspective is the typical behind-the-batter view, switching to overhead when the ball gets hit into play. You should also try the sequel, *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000*.

Notable Quotable:

"Forget realism, forget statistics; this game was designed for one thing—FUN! *Baseball Simulator* has got to be the most unique sports game ever made." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

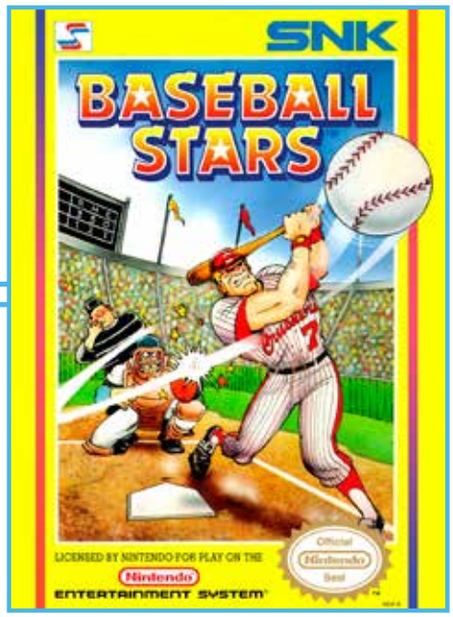
Notable Quotable:

"On the surface this appears to be standard NES baseball fare, with small, squat players, simple gameplay, and intuitive controls. The behind-the-batter pitching screen makes it easy to gauge incoming curveballs, and when a ball is hit you get a nice wide angle of the field . . .pacing is brisk, allowing you to toss one pitch after the next with minimal pauses. The fielding is a bit weak, with fly balls that take forever to come back down and a second baseman that insists on covering first base. It sounds pretty average until you discover *Simulator*'s ace in the hole: the Ultra League . . .power-ups add humor and variety, but since they're limited they add a strategic element as well. In 'normal mode' *Baseball Simulator*'s music is absolutely unbearable with constant ear-splitting whistles, but thankfully it's much better in Ultra League mode. And that's really the only mode you'll need." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Baseball Stars

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



A game that often comes up when NES fans discuss their favorite sports titles, *Baseball Stars* is a highly enjoyable rendition of America's favorite pastime, giving armchair athletes arcade style action with plenty of simulation features that were unusual for the time. You can earn money; set starting lineups; hire, fire, and trade players (including females, which is nice); improve players' hitting, batting, running, defense, chance, and prestige; improve pitchers' stamina and speed; and change player names and team logos. The game also includes leadoffs, steals, pickoffs, diving catches, jumping catches, the ability for players to climb walls, and other fun features. While on the mound you have manual control over curveballs, fastballs, sinkers, and off-speed pitches. Batting consists of timing your swing as the ball crosses the plate. Battery backup lets you track key statistics and win-loss records for 14 different fictional teams, each with 18 players. You can edit and customize six of the teams.

Notable Quotable:

"Simply crushed every other NES baseball release . . .smooth fielding controls . . . The batter/pitcher interface really couldn't have been delivered much better." —*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Baseball Stars* the 63rd greatest game of all time

Insider Insight: *Baseball Stars* was the first NES sports game to feature battery backup. If you have the time and patience for it, you could create a six-team league with each team playing a 125-game schedule! Obviously you're not going to finish a full season in one sitting, so the battery could save your progress, allowing you to turn off your NES and continue at a later time. As kids, myself and five of my friends thought it would be a great idea to create a full league, with each team being controlled by one of us. To make things more interesting each of our teams would have the players' names edited to reflect our own little league teammates and other friends/family. We got about three-fourths of the way through a season, which took us a little more than six months. The cart changed hands a few times over those months to accommodate for vacations and groundings (mostly mine). Needless to say, a whole lot of blood, sweat, and tears went into this season, and the battery in our cart was holding it all together.

One fateful day my father decided to play my NES while I was at school. When I returned home, I turned on my console to discover that our season was gone! All those hours wasted! That was bad, but the worst part was figuring out how I was going to tell my friends that all their hard work was for nothing. I invited them all over that night and held an "Owners' Meeting." After I broke down what had happened they mostly understood, except for my friend James. He still hasn't spoken to me to this day. Let that be a lesson to you all—Don't let your parents play your NES. —Mike Vito, writer at HeyPoorPlayer.com

Insider Insight: *Baseball Stars* was the most fun I'd ever had with a baseball game as a kid. While it didn't include MLB-licensed teams and players, the game made up for it by offering players an extremely deep franchise mode that allowed you to create and name your own team and players. The names of my players were heavily influenced by hip hop circa 1989–1990: "Now batting third, Chuck D from Public Enemy!"

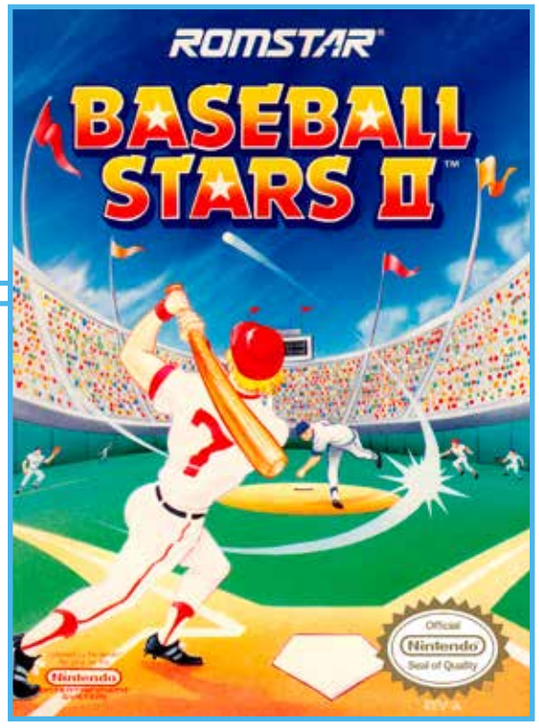
You had a limited amount of money at the start of the game to develop your lineup, and as you progressed and won games you would earn more money, which you would then use towards improving your players' skills. *Baseball Stars* was at its most difficult when you were just getting started and winning games required serious skill. The best, but often the most intense, way to improve your team was to take on friends who were similar to you regarding player development. The stakes were high in these one-on-one matchups with friends in league play since the winning team earned cash to improve their team, while the losing team received nothing. Lose too many of these matchups against your friends and it wouldn't be long before their team was too strong for you to even compete with!

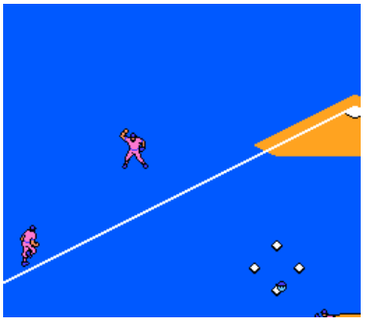
By the time you were onto season three or four with the same team each of your batters could routinely hit 30-plus home runs per season and flirt with a batting average around 500 or higher, and pitchers could throw 100 mph well into the fifth or sixth innings. The only complaint I had with the game was with battery saves. There were many times when I would pop the game in to play only to find out that the battery had decided that all of my (and my friend's) progress had to go. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Baseball Stars II

PUBLISHER: Romstar
DEVELOPER: Pixel
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992





While it's a quality title like the original game, *Baseball Stars II* does take away one of the more enjoyable features of *Baseball Stars*: the ability to alter the names of the teams and the players. Luckily, the audio/visuals have been spruced up a bit and gamers can still hire and fire players, dive for grounders, pick off runners, earn money to improve player stats, and much more. There are 12 set teams and 6 save slots for user-created squads. Unfortunately, there are no female players this time around, which seems regressive, since the game was released several years after the original. On a positive note there are four selectable stadiums, and you can now shift your outfield formation left and right. Like *Baseball Stars*, this sequel lacks Major League licensing, meaning fake team and player names are used.

Notable Quotable:

"In this terrific sequel, Romstar has improved the graphics and added options, but retained the same excellent core gameplay . . .graphics look more vibrant, and the pitching screen has been revamped to include 'windows' of first and third base on each side of the screen (second base can be seen behind the pitcher). This makes good use of the screen real estate and allows the defense to keep a close eye on runners . . .instantly fun . . .retains a few problems from the first game, including fly balls that are hard to track down . . .audio effects are lighthearted and fun . . . Pleasant background music." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

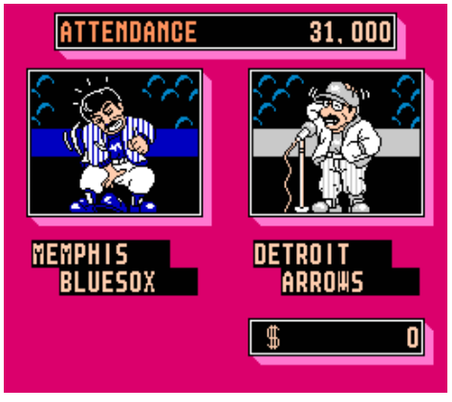
Notable Quotable:

"The beauty of *Baseball Stars II* is that it improves upon the original while leaving the core gameplay intact, although admittedly these improvements are minor . . . Graphical improvements include more realistic looking characters, and a split-screen displaying both first and third base . . .colors . . .look more vibrant." —Chris Alaimo (www.egquarterly.com)

Notable Quotable:

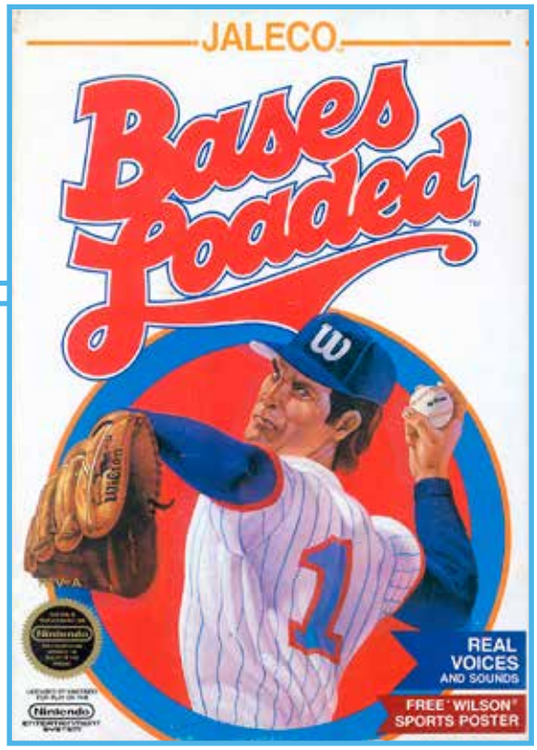
"If you already own the original *Baseball Stars*, you'll be disappointed that the sequel isn't much more than a clone. If you don't own an NES baseball game this is a great catch. Because of its battery backup and great controls you'll never get tired of it. *Baseball Stars II* is a great way to get into the swing of the 1992 baseball season without worrying about contract negotiations or player injuries. Isn't that every baseball fan's dream?" —*GamePro* (June 1992)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Bases Loaded

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



Jaleco took a crack at realism with *Bases Loaded* and succeeded fairly well, despite the lack of Major League MLBPA licensing. The game helped popularize the behind-the-pitcher camera angle, and it is famous for its use of "bean balls" that hit batters in the face, sometimes causing a bench-clearing brawl. Each of the game's 12 teams is comprised of 30 players (12 pitchers and 18 fielders), each rated according to batting average or ERA. The Pennant mode is comprised of a whopping 132 games. Other features include bunts, steals, pickoffs, pinch hitters, relief pitchers, voice effects, various types of pitches, and more. Based on Jaleco's 1987 arcade game.

Notable Quotable:

"This game is a mixed bag. It has attractive animation and good graphics combined with

a very intensive hitter-pitcher simulation. However, the frustrations frequently threaten to overwhelm its virtues." —*Computer Gaming World* (December 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"As with *Tecmo Baseball*, it's fun to experiment with the teams, finding out who's good at what and trying out different pitches. Otherwise, the game has too many flaws to recommend it . . .you can't see the outfielders until the ball is directly over them and their throws to different bases are frustratingly slow . . .adequate graphics, nothing more . . .not only are the crowd sounds and music bad, but the bat hits the ball with a metallic clang! Are these guys using aluminum bats *and* balls?" —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

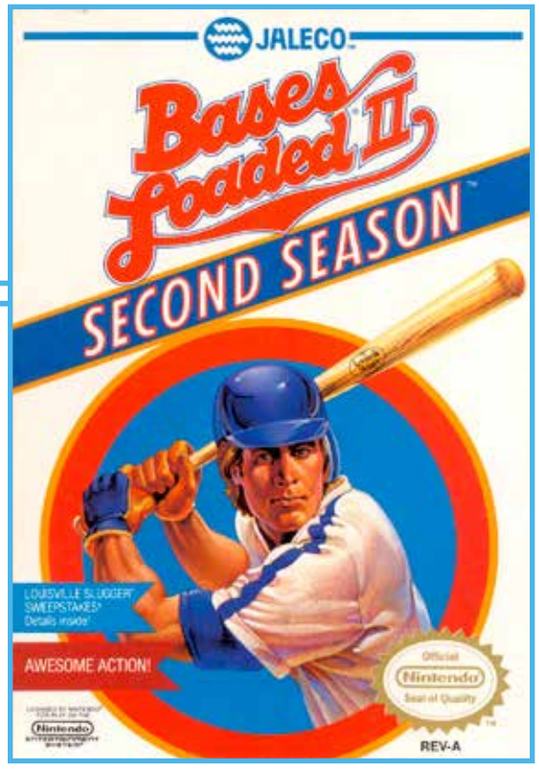
"*Bases Loaded*'s many sequels might have progressively updated the design's features, graphics, and gameplay, but this original trip out to the ballpark is about as barebones as it gets . . .don't expect much action . . .largely lifeless in its over-the-pitcher's shoulder standard gameplay view, as there's very little animation and even less gameplay to experience. As the pitcher, you have little control over the ball's flight to the plate . . .batting's not much better . . .your man can't move around in the batter's box . . .there's no adjusting your position to back away from the pitcher or crowd the plate. Fielding is fine . . . The liveliest part of the package is its brief cinema scenes that show a cringing pitcher after a batter belts a homer." —Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com) playing the NES game downloaded to the Wii

Insider Insight: *Bases Loaded* is one of the first games that made me say "wow!" after I saw how realistic the visuals were. Before *Bases Loaded*, the only baseball video games I had played were *Baseball* for the Atari 2600 and *Major League Baseball* on the NES. The players in *Bases Loaded* were huge, and the behind-the-pitcher camera angle during pitches made it seem like an actual TV broadcast. The game's box art was as awesome as the game itself and always reminded me of my favorite bubble gum, Big League Chew. This is also one of those games that was accompanied by a schoolyard rumor. The rumor was that if you hit the opposing team's star player with a pitch he would charge the mound and beat the hell out of your pitcher. Like most video game rumors I didn't believe that this would actually happen. I begged my dad to let me rent the game one weekend so I could put the rumor to the test, and lo and behold, I hit a star player and he beat the hell out of my pitcher! My dad couldn't believe his eyes. The player doesn't just throw a few punches either, he kicks the pitcher in the head a few times! And who could forget those umpire names?! Yuk, Dumb, Boo, and Bum. *Bases Loaded* is a true baseball classic! —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bases Loaded II: Second Season

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



Bases Loaded II adds a few new features to the franchise, including additional camera angles, faster fielders (who are better at ball), and the ability for fielders to dive and make leaping catches. One curious new feature is the use of biorhythms, which track the players in three different categories: physical, sensitivity, and intellectual. When a player's readings are low he should probably be pulled from the lineup. The game takes you through a 130-game season, and if you win 75 games, you win the pennant and a trip to the World Series. Includes bunting, relief pitchers, pinch hitters, wild pitches, pickoff plays, and much more.

Notable Quotable:

"Smooth gameplay, realistic player abilities . . . The graphics in this game are the only low point. They are jagged, and the baseball is very hard to see in the field perspective (after the ball is put into play) the players are downright tiny and look like stick figures. Jaleco attempted to improve this in later versions of the game by increasing player size . . .impressive game . . . A fun game to play . . .its special attributes make it very addicting . . . I like the running commentary." —Joshua Hoffman (formerly at allgame.com)

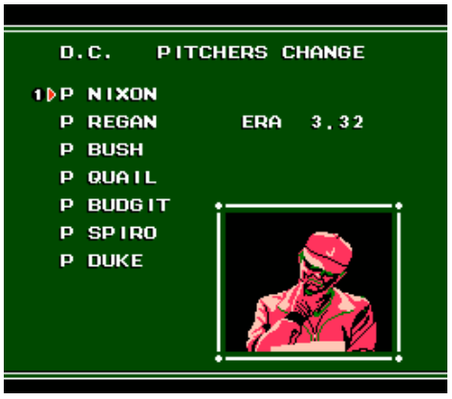
Notable Quotable:

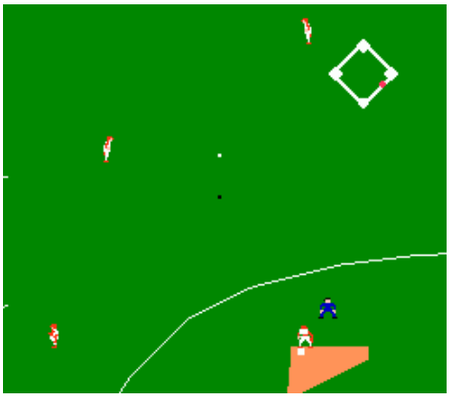
"There was room for improvement, but *Second Season* breaks more than it fixes . . .while the players are smaller, they're also better animated, so it's hard to complain . . . Once a ball is hit into play everything goes straight to hell. Instead of the classic 'from the plate' fielding perspective you get an awkward 'down the baseline' angle that's as disorienting as it is ugly . . .blob-like fielders that move in a choppy, unsightly manner, rendering the new dive moves worthless . . .sloppy in general, with lousy control exacerbated by rough outfield scrolling . . .unbearable looping theme song that won't go away." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Way back in the glory days when me and my NES were still young, my dad bought me a game for my ninth birthday called *Bases Loaded II: Second Season* . . . I scoffed at the game because I hadn't ever been that big of a fan of sports video games at all. Unexpectedly, it would only take a few plays of this engaging baseball title before I would be hooked for the rest of my life . . . The batters have diverse statistics, separate builds, and even different stances. The pitchers also have a good variety in the way they move and the way they look . . .the gameplay is just as lifelike . . .the pitchers have nice animation while pitching, but the audience and the almost faceless players need a facelift . . . From the repetitive but very catchy music, to the sounds of the bat hitting the ball, to the various umpire calls, the sounds are pretty good." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

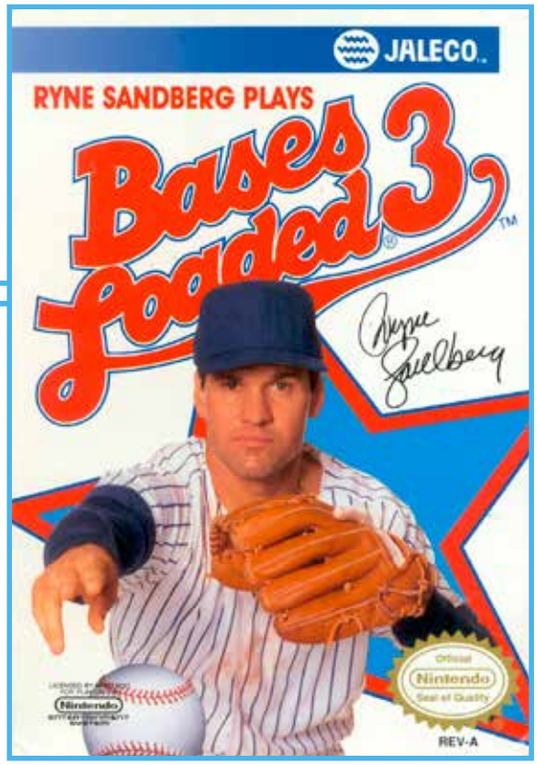
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Bases Loaded 3 (Ryne Sandberg Plays)

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Endorsed by Ryne Sandberg, who played for the Chicago Cubs and was a perennial all-star of the late 1980s and early 1990s, *Bases Loaded 3* drops the lengthy seasonal play of the first two games in the series and substitutes a challenge to play the perfect game—this was not a change for the better. Your team's quality of play is ranked on a scale of one to five, and your ultimate goal is to be able to defeat a level-five team. There are three stadiums from which to choose and a team edit feature. One confounding alteration was the change in fielding perspective. Once the ball is hit into play, home plate appears at the top of the screen (with center field at the bottom), making for an awkward view of the game. The batter can swing his bat at three different heights and move side to side in the box, but not up and down. Standard features return, including bunting, stealing bases, diving catches, and substituting players.

Notable Quotable:

"A childhood favorite of mine . . .the graphics are really good . . .except for that ginormous bat . . .hard to bat . . .because the ball doesn't scale . . . When your opponent hits the ball you have no idea where your fielders are . . .you can't get a feeling where they should be." —Sick0Fant (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

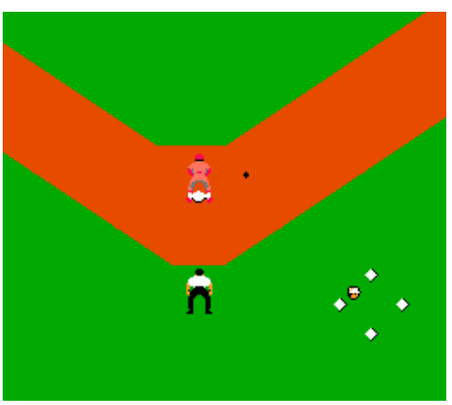
"I like baseball games, and they have improved dramatically over the last year. But the only reason to bring out a new version is if there are MAJOR improvements. The game is slightly better than *BL2*, but this version is hard to get used to. It's not a bad game, but not revolutionary." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"More playable than *Second Season*, but *Bases Loaded 3* isn't in the same league as the original . . . The pitcher/batter screen looks slightly more detailed this time, but the strike zone is smaller and harder to judge . . .the swing controls are less responsive so you need to commit earlier . . . The players are nicely animated and pretty huge by NES standards . . .the soundtrack has all the charm of a kazoo player." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

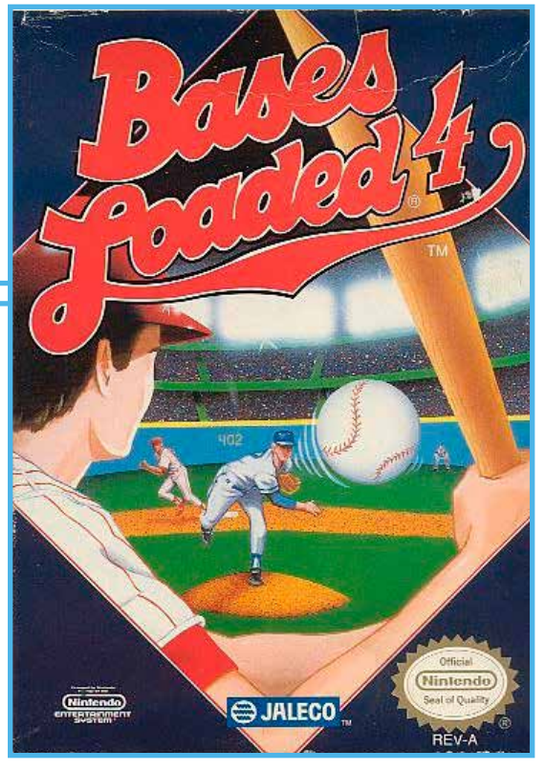
"The pitching view has good-sized players and some smooth animation from the characters, especially the batter when he swings . . .the crowd in the background comes alive when you have a runner in scoring position . . . The characters are also a decent size in the outfield view . . .the music can get on your nerves after a short while. Thankfully you can turn it off. The sound effects, on the other hand, sound great, like the swish of the bat when you swing and the bounce of the ball on the grass. The voice clips from the umpire are very clear . . .the computer seems to have an advantage that can be frustrating . . . When you hit a pop fly to the outfield they usually have a player that happens to be in the right spot to make the catch . . . Ryne Sandberg's name doesn't really add anything; he doesn't even appear in the game at all, just on the box art and cartridge label." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net)

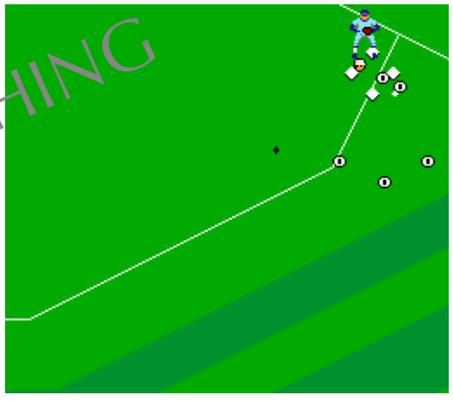


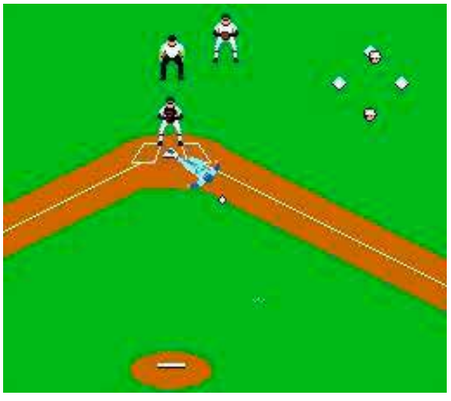
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bases Loaded 4

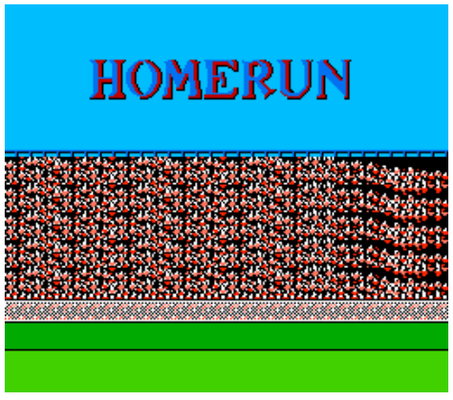
PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993







While it wisely drops the perfect game goal of *Bases Loaded 3*, *Bases Loaded 4*, which was Jaleco's last 8-bit entry in the series, keeps the oddly disconcerting, behind-the-head fielding perspective intact. When a player wins 70 regular season games he or she enters the Super Series championship round. A slaughter rule dictates that if a team is ahead by nine or more runs in the bottom of any inning they will automatically win, and players are awarded black (bad) or white (good) stars depending on the quality of their pitching or hitting performance. Like the first three games in the series, *Bases Loaded 4* lacks licensing from Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players' Association, meaning player and team names are fictional. If you'd like you can simply kick back and watch the computer play itself.



Notable Quotable:

"Great voices with 'strike' and other words perfectly intelligible . . .just plain boring. The graphics are solid and don't break up. Playing against the computer is frustrating—it's awfully good . . .gameplay is choppy, and it can be difficult to even hit the ball. The game has detailed stats and such, but it's not the most action-packed title around . . .just isn't that exciting . . .mediocre at best . . .isn't innovative enough to be considered a must-have." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1993)

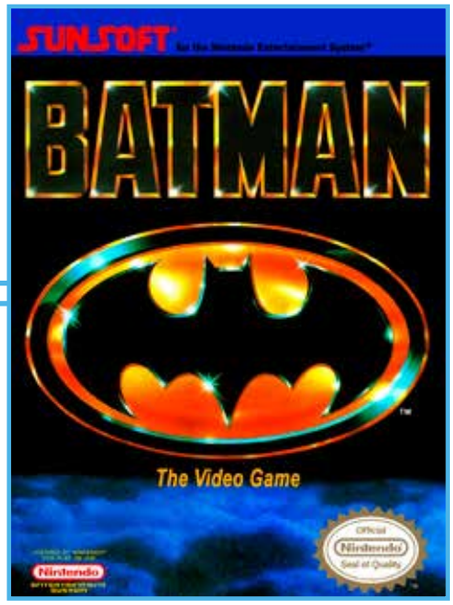
Notable Quotable:

"*Bases Loaded 4* is the best game in the series. Everything that was top-notch about *3* remains excellent here; heck, they even improved the tracking. During field play there is a smaller map off to the right-hand side of the screen that tracks the ball and your fielders' locations, so you can move them appropriately. Remember in the first game how your large sprites would change to freaky pixel demons when it would switch to field play? No longer. Your sprites are just as large batting and pitching as they are out in the field . . . Only two *Bases Loaded* games should have ever been produced for the NES: the original which, for better or worse, introduced some new ideas to the land of NES baseball; and *Bases Loaded 4*, which brings together the full *Bases Loaded* package. But to release this as the fourth in the series with little to no change in gameplay, two years after the series made the 16-bit upgrade, is absurd." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Batman

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Batman puts you in the role of DC Comics' Dark Knight Detective, who works his way through five exciting stages: Gotham City, Axis Chemical Factory, Underground Conduit, Laboratory Ruins, and Cathedral. Batman can punch enemies, in addition to gaining and using three optional Bat-weapons: spear gun, a dirk (which shoots in three s[illegible]ctions), and a Batarang. These items [illegible]eful in battling a variety of obstacles and bad guys, including homing mines, bomb-dropping claws, K.G. Beast, Deadshot, and even the Joker himself. A spry hero, Batman can kneel and pull off three types of jumps: normal, Batman, and wall. Along with *Batman: Return of the Joker* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project*, *Batman* is one of the better superhero games for the NES. The graphics do a good job of capturing the dark, somber tone of the movie, and the music, though unfortunately not reminiscent of Danny Elfman's film score from Tim Burton's 1989 film upon which the game is loosely based, is nonetheless engaging and conducive to gameplay. There's a wide variety of well-animated villains constantly after Batman, and although they are slightly too easy to dispatch, the tough-as-nails bosses at the end of each level more than make up for it.

Memories: Leading up to the 1989 *Batman* film I was super excited, because the filmmakers and studio were taking the property seriously (many people of the era still associated the character with the campy Adam West TV show). I bought the novelization at the mall bookstore ahead of the movie and was all over the trading cards and action figures. Same with the NES game. I bought it right away and played the heck out of it. I never beat the Joker, but it certainly wasn't for lack of trying.

Notable Quotable:

"There's a huge amount of detail in the game and I could wibble on about it for hours. Instead I'll merely say that whether you're a Batfan or not, the atmospheric graphics, great gameplay, and the challenge of 20 different sections make this a real treat. You would be batty to miss out on this." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"There are loads of weapons to collect, even though the levels are rather short. Many of the enemies that attack look as though they've been hijacked from other games . . . The game is very good and there are some stunning graphical effects—particularly where Batman dies in a burst of flames." —*Raze* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"The ominous graphics capture Batman's smooth, agile movements and unique superhero action. The finely honed physique, billowing cape, and graceful movements that have long been associated with Batman highlight this adventure. Cinema-graphics (à la *Ninja Gaiden*) set the stage for each of the five levels." —*Nintendo Power* (September 1989)

Insider Insight: Nineteen-eighty-nine was a banner year for Batman fans. There was a great movie in theaters and more merchandise for the character than in recent memory. The Caped Crusader was everywhere, including video games, and his first NES outing ranks among my favorite games of all time. It's not that it's a great Batman game per se, since it doesn't really do anything special for the character. In fact, you could swap him out for some generic hero type and the game would play exactly the same. No, what makes it so special is that it's just a great game overall. Presentation, gameplay, level design—all of it is done well. The action is top-notch, and it features another wonderful Sunsoft soundtrack.

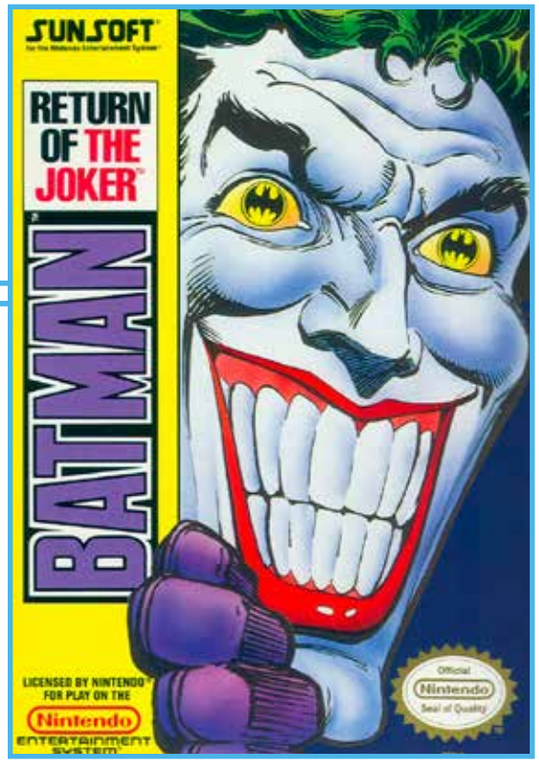
I remember playing it for the first time. A friend rented it, and our group of friends walked back to his house. His NES was connected to the TV and stereo via component cables (a big upgrade back then), so we got to hear that glorious soundtrack by Nobuyuki Hara and Naoki Kodaka (the latter also being responsible for the Genesis *Batman* soundtrack) through 12-inch stereo speakers. My friend's mom must have told us to lower the volume a dozen times that day! The action was furious, the levels were hard, and the graphics were dark but detailed and crisp. I loved it!

Even today I play *Batman* a lot. I've only beaten the Joker once, but I'll never stop trying. It doesn't have to be about finishing the game, though. *Batman* is fun enough to make it worthwhile. If you own an NES, you need to have this title in your library. —Ken Horowitz, administrator of Sega-16.com, author of *Playing at the Next Level: A History of American Sega Games* and *The Sega Arcade Revolution: A History in 62 Games*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Batman: Return of the Joker

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



A game that every superhero fan should play, *Batman: Return of the Joker* pits the Caped Crusader against the Clown Prince of Crime and his henchmen. Using a basic shooting mechanism, a jetpack, four types of extremely cool projectile weapons (crossbow, Batarang, sonic neutralizer, and shield star), and the ability to jump over obstacles, slide attack, and duck, Batman must battle his way through seven challenging, hugely enjoyable stages that scroll horizontally and vertically: Gotham City Cathedral, The Joker's Warehouse, Snow Mountain, Refinery, Underground Conduit, Ammunition Base, and Island of Ha-Hacienda. Batman crouches, dodges fire and spikes, jumps on moving platforms, battles atop a moving train, goes airborne for some side-scrolling shooter action, and more, but he can't do wall jumps this time around. The visuals, which feature parallax scrolling, rich coloring, detailed backgrounds, and large characters, are a pitch-perfect complement to the exemplary gameplay.

Notable Quotable:
"This cart has about the best looking visuals that I've seen on the NES. Despite the graphic improvement there is something missing from this sequel that made the first so good. The gameplay is limited to a walk and shoot contest with pretty graphics and shallow gameplay." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"I was very unimpressed with this game . . . The animation is lackluster, the game control is poor, and whomever thought of making NES sprites this large must have been half asleep. The sprites flicker so much that there are times when your character is up to 50% missing from the screen when there are no enemies to be seen at all. The only saving grace here is great sound, and while paused the graphics look very sharp; I had hoped for much more." —*Game Zero* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Closely mimics the look and feel of the classic strip that made the Dark Knight a legend . . . Gorgeous graphics . . . The boss battles have a great comic book feel with an unusual system of point countdown power meters for the boss and Batman . . .the theme music's as cool as the rest of the game . . . Aspiring Dark Knights will find this game definitely isn't as challenging as the original because of the password system, but don't let that hold you back. This is still one of the best NES games of the year." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

Insider Insight: As it did with several other games, *Game Players* magazine made me want to play *Batman: Return of the Joker*. When I read the write-up for this game, I thought that it looked AMAZING! The Caped Crusader was so big and detailed, and the levels looked super cool to my young eyes. When I first got *Return of the Joker* I played through the first level, but it wasn't until the first Gaming4Guts Charity Marathon in 2015 that I *really* played the game. I couldn't stop playing it and went through the whole game in one sitting. The music, the graphics, the gameplay—everything about it rivals the original *Batman* NES game based on Tim Burton's 1989 film. It might even be a little bit better, despite lacking that movie tie-in game's iconic reputation. Regardless, this is a worthy follow-up title that does *not* disappoint and should be played by any Batman fan, or fan of good games in general. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

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Return of The Joker™
NEW GAME
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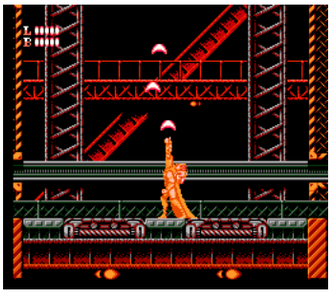


Batman Returns

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

Based on Tim Burton's 1992 feature film, *Batman Returns* is a brawler in the mold of games like *Double Dragon* and *Streets of Rage*, but with more redundant action than those stellar titles. You control the Dark Knight Detective as he punches and kicks his way through six levels of sword swallowers, clowns, skull riders, stilt walkers, strong men, and other enemies, including Catwoman and Penguin, both of whom starred in the movie. You can also hurl Batarangs and use a grappling hook for taking down flying enemies, climbing up to higher areas, and more. Levels include Gotham Plaza, Shreck's Department Store, Save The Ice Princess, The Circus Train, The Penguin's Army, and Arctic World. Like the Super Nintendo version of the game, this one lets you commandeer the Batmobile (in side-scrolling action), which shoots discs and bullets. You can control the Batskiboat as well (also featuring side-scrolling shooter gameplay). As in *Final Fight*, one of the more powerful combat moves (in this case a spinning cape attack) takes health away from the protagonist, leading to inevitable frustration.

Notable Quotable:

"The crooks in this game are an average looking, unimaginative assortment . . . The dark, color-deficient graphics are sharp and distinct, but not even close to an 8-bit masterpiece. The occasional cinemas are there, but don't pop off the screen like a VCR tape. Tunes-wise the music and sound effects could be from any Konami action game. In a year of few 8-bit standouts, *Batman Returns* is a good choice for fist fighters and Robin-wannabes who aren't expecting anything extraordinary. However, the crime stopping is not up to par with an innovative original." —*GamePro* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Really fun, but also a pretty challenging game, and yet another great game starring Batman on the NES . . .a downgrade perhaps from what Sunsoft accomplished in both *Batman: The Video Game* and *Batman: Return of the Joker*, but although *Returns*' gameplay is much more simplistic, it doesn't mean it's not as action-packed as its siblings on the console . . . Batman has a decent repertoire of moves that can be reliably pulled off . . . One of the stand-out elements in both the Tim Burton films was Batman's incredible vehicles, and I'm glad to report they make an appearance here and add much-needed variety to the simplistic beat-'em-up action." —Blair Farrell (comicgamersassemble.com)

Insider Insight: The Caped Crusader had it a lot better than other comic book characters on the NES, even though his games weren't as authentic to the character as they could've been, especially *Batman: Return of the Joker*, which had Batman dispensing justice with firearms.

For Tim Burton's first film Sunsoft had exclusive rights to the character, and they released *Batman: The Video Game*. But that changed with the sequel, *Batman Returns*, which divided its rights between Atari, Konami, and Sega. *Batman: The Video Game* took inspiration from precision platform games like *Ninja Gaiden*, but *Batman Returns* skewed closer to the arcade style, beat-'em-up action similar to how the company approached the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* license. This wasn't a bad thing, as the *TMNT* games on the NES—especially the second and third games—were terrific, and Konami did a fine job applying that formula to DC's Dark Knight.

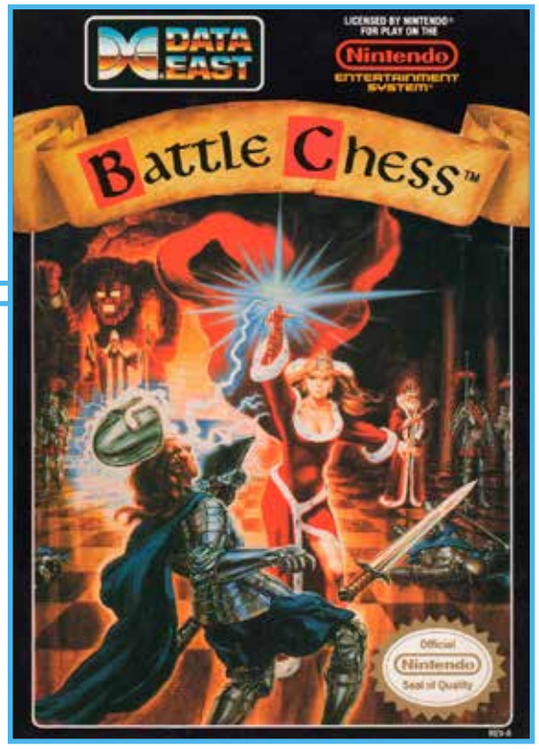
I rented *Batman Returns* less often than *Batman: The Video Game* because by the time *Batman Returns* was released, fewer and fewer stores were stocking NES software as they made space for Super Nintendo games. What I mostly remember about renting *Batman Returns* was getting frustrated due to my lack of progress, not because the game was bad, but because I wasn't good at it. One time I jumped to the password screen after dying and mashed in a random set of characters. Expecting to get an error, I was floored that whatever I put in warped me to Penguin's lair near the end of the game.

After getting frustrated once more I tried and tried to reproduce the sequence I had entered but to no avail, meaning that to make it to the end I had to take the long way around. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do this until well into my adult years. —Blair Farrell, creator of Comic Gamers Assemble (comicgamersassemble.com), author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Battle Chess

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

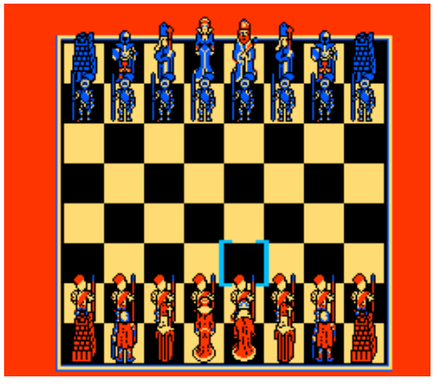


Adapted from the 1988 computer game *Battle Chess* for the NES is a playable chess simulator (the computer A.I. is certainly f[illegible]), but the animations move much s[illegible] than their PC counterparts, making the battle scenarios a chore to watch. There is a standard 2D mode of play with ordinary chess pieces and no animations, but the computer takes a long time choosing its moves, meaning the game is still slow. In 3D mode (pseudo-3D actually) the chess pieces appear primarily in human form (the knight has no horse, for example) and come to life when moved. During a capture, the scene switches to a computer-directed battle set against a castle background, with humorous and violent predetermined cutscenes. Features include: take back (undo your last move); replay (replay your last move); suggest move (get hints from the computer); and five difficulty levels.

Memories: When I was in my late teens and early twenties I went through a pseudo-intellectual phase where I was interested in classic literature, hypnotism, memory tricks, self-help books, and the like. This included chess. I played the actual board game with friends, but also *Battle Chess* and *The Chessmaster*, the latter for the Sega Game Gear. I got to where I could challenge a mediocre opponent, but not much beyond that. These days chess of any kind gives me tired-head.

Notable Quotable:
"Don't get all excited and think you get to battle the pieces yourself. The only difference between this and *Chessmaster* is that the pieces act out a little scene every time a piece is taken. If you are looking for a battling chess game get *Archon*." —NES Archives (www.nesarchives.com)

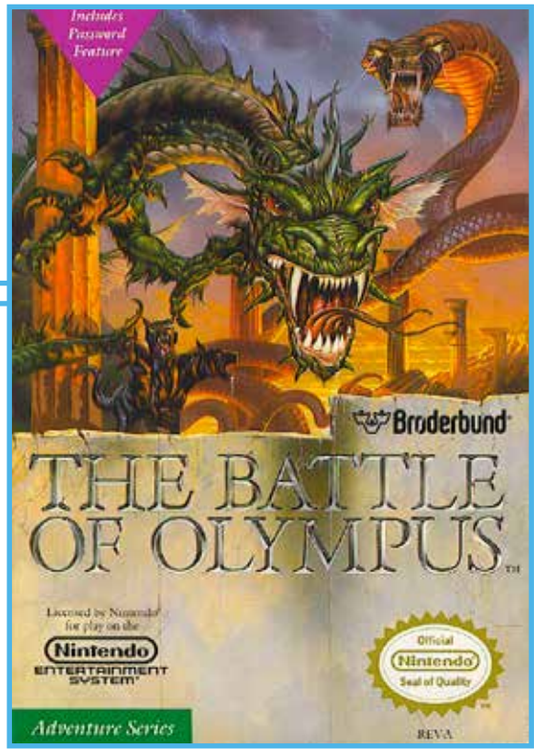
Notable Quotable:
"The colors are minimal and bland. The pieces are a lazy attempt to capture their PC counterparts. There's almost nothing to look at as far as background is concerned . . .once the combatants encounter each other (after a nice little do-si-do to get into position), they are transported into a realm I can only assume is hell considering how murky, lifeless, bleak, and hopeless it appears. From there the characters become an even more grotesque representation of themselves. They duke it out with actions that are slow, vague, confusing—even more so due to the harsh cries, groans, and the sound of clashing metal . . . It's a chore to watch your impotent players lumber across a lifeless board. It's a chore to wait as the computer runs through every possible scenario like Joshua trying to win World War III in *War Games*." —Nerdbacon (nerdbacon.com)

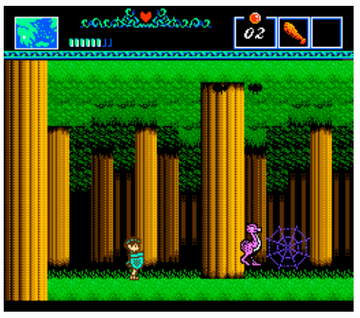


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Battle of Olympus

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software
DEVELOPER: Infinity
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990





The Battle of Olympus plays a lot like *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* (complete with a side-view perspective), but is set in ancient Greece instead of Hyrule. Players control Orpheus on a mythological quest to rescue his beloved Helene, whose soul has been stolen by Hades. Armed with a club and the ability to acquire a sword, a staff (unleashes the fire of Prometheus), a crystal ball, a harp (enables players to fly on the wings of Pegasus), the sandals of Hermes (for jumping higher), and other weapons, Orpheus must battle his way through labyrinthine woods, ruins, villages, valleys, mountains, swamps, and caves. Each of the game's eight levels is home to a gift-bearing god or goddess, such as Zeus or Athena. Enemies in this challenging, lavishly illustrated game include cyclopean beasts, centaurs, minotaurs, serpents, rock giants, and other fantastical creatures.

Notable Quotable:

"If you've been toying with the idea of getting into NES adventuring, *Battle of Olympus* is as good a place as any to start. The graphics are mighty fine, the quest is exciting, and there's a hell of a lot of game here for your money." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

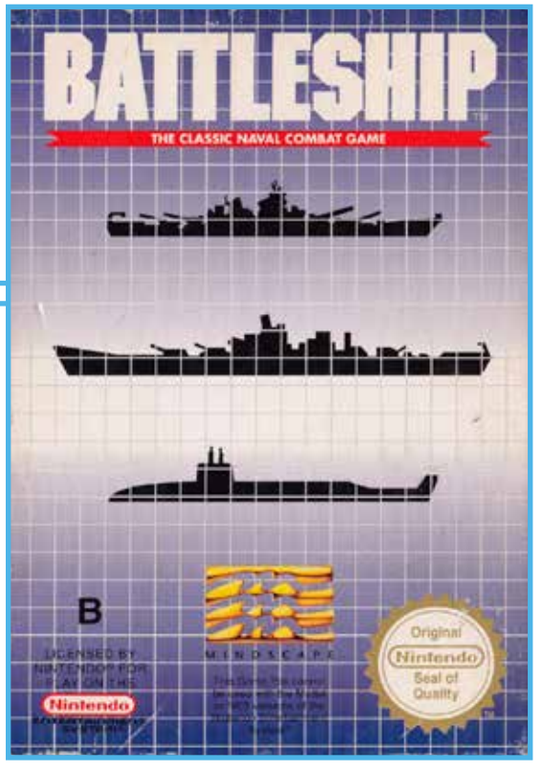
"Nintendo's quality . . .they made the best games around those times, and I wanted to make a game of similar quality, too. I didn't know if I would be able catch up with them, but I put my whole effort into the game. So did my wife. Her challenge was to make the most beautiful game graphics possible, and there's been a lot of praise for her work. All on such a small cartridge—only 16 colors! A very limited environment." —Yukio Horimoto (via www.usgamer.net), programmer and co-designer of *The Battle of Olympus*

Insider Insight: I've played maybe 10 minutes of *Battle of Olympus*, but it's always held such a place of fascination for me because of its crazy TV commercial. I had rented *The Guardian Legend* after seeing its TV commercial and I thought it was one of the coolest games I ever played. Then sometime later, the same commercial for *Guardian Legend* came on, but out of nowhere, the commercial I thought I knew gets interrupted by a *different* commercial for *Battle of Olympus*, claiming it's "the most action-packed adventure of all time." Such a strange marketing ploy, but I simply had to have the game, as it looked like *Zelda II*, and I loved *Zelda II*! At the end of the commercial it asked me to decide between *Guardian Legend* and *Battle of Olympus*, and my little mind couldn't do it. Fortunately my rental shop made that decision for me by not stocking *Battle of Olympus*. So more *Guardian Legend* it was! I should really go back and finish *Battle of Olympus* sometime. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Battleship

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Mindscape
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



Battleship for the NES is a nice take on Milton Bradley's classic naval warfare board game, despite the confounding, almost unforgivable lack of a two-player mode. You take turns with the computer, bombing the other player's ships. As with the board game you have numerous missiles, but this video game adds a limited supply of 10 different special weapons (warheads, torpedoes, depth charges, and the like), each of which covers more ground than a standard missile (which hits just one square on the 12×8 grid). In addition, the NES cartridge includes a new type of ship: a frigate. The game is over when you or the computer have lost all of your ships, or when you have progressed through 40 battles.

Notable Quotable:

"With no multiplayer, overly repetitive gameplay, and a dismal soundtrack, this game gets thrown to the pile of other poorly chosen board games that were adapted to video games . . . While the talking *Battleship* board game is cool, even the old-school one missing some red pegs outdoes this title. Do yourself a favor and invest your money into the actual *Battleship*, and pass on this one." —Retro4Ever (formerly at retro4ever.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I get that it's all about strategy, and it's based off of a general board, but the only decent graphics are the intro picture, the ending picture, and the 'scope' view when you fire . . . The audio was decent enough. The music was good at first, but it got a little tiring . . .the music could have been varied more between rounds, but it's the same song when you set up your ships every round, same song during the battle portion, and same song you hear during the battle report portion . . . The sound effects are few and unvarying as well . . .if you're into strategy and boardgame-style games this game can be a decent one . . .it can get a bit tedious after a while." —Drew Wilson (www.freezenet.ca)

Notable Quotable:

"With the possible exception of Tic-Tac-Toe, board games don't get much simpler than *Battleship*. Even when they added fancy plastic parts and computerized voices, the game was essentially nothing more than a guessing game . . . This 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System game attempts to add some depth and mission structure to *Battleship*. The game offers plenty of levels to master and ships to place, as well as new weapons that can give you the upper hand in nearly every situation. And yet *Battleship* on the NES doesn't go far enough. Even after going through a couple dozen stages I couldn't get over the feeling that I would rather have a real person playing next to me." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

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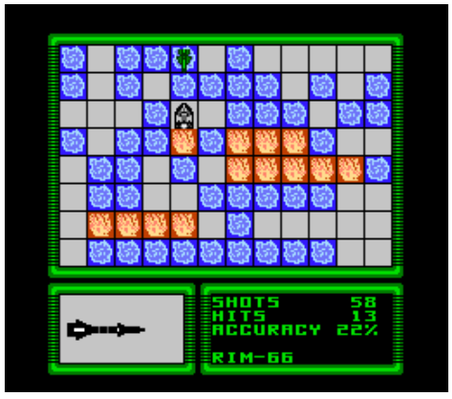
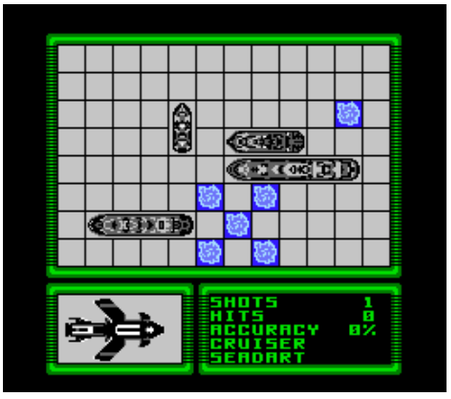
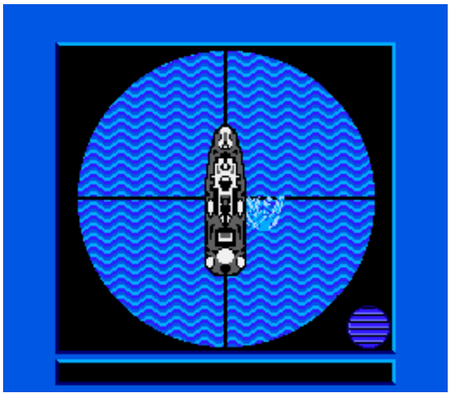
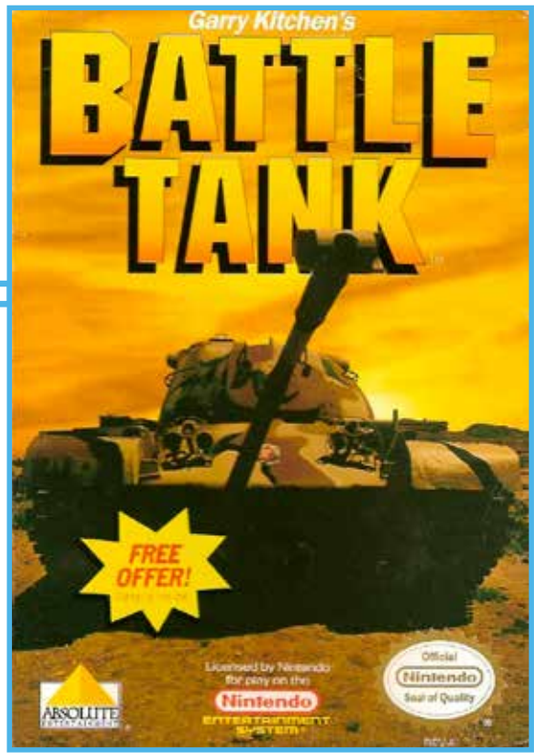






Battletank (Garry Kitchen's)

PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: First-Person Tank Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



A slow, methodical game, *Battletank* puts players at the helm of an armored vehicle that can steer right and left, speed up and slow down, reverse direction, raise and lower cannon and weapon sight, and fire. Weapons include 150 mm shells, wire-guided shells (which lock onto fast-moving enemies at long range), smoke screens, and 50 caliber machine guns. There are 10 relatively brief missions (taking place through mountains, deserts, icy fields, and other areas), each involving such maneuvers as avoiding mines, shooting enemy tanks and helicopters, and destroying enemy strongholds, including a train yard, a refinery, and a nuclear power plant. Players will also visit NATO headquarters (for repairs, refueling, and rearming), study a satellite radar map, and monitor the tank's readouts, which include damage warning lights, short range radar, compass, number of enemies remaining, and more. Ultimately, the action comes down to locating stuff and destroying it, which can get a little old. The arid wastelands—presumably of the Middle East variety—are a monotonous brown, and the green areas, which are also boring looking, lack clouds. The programmers could have spent more time detailing the terrain and the skies. The tanks and instrument panel, on the other hand, are very nicely drawn. The game is playable, but not terribly exciting.

Memories: Garry Kitchen is one of the nicest guys in the business. When I set up at video game conventions and he's there as a guest, he always makes a point to come by and say hello. At the 2017 Portland Retro Gaming Expo we got to talking about Powell's Books and discovered that we share a mutual interest beyond video games: collecting paperback books featuring cover art by the likes of Frank Frazetta, Ken Kelly, and Boris Vallejo. Do me a favor—don't tell Garry I'm not a big *Battletank* fan.

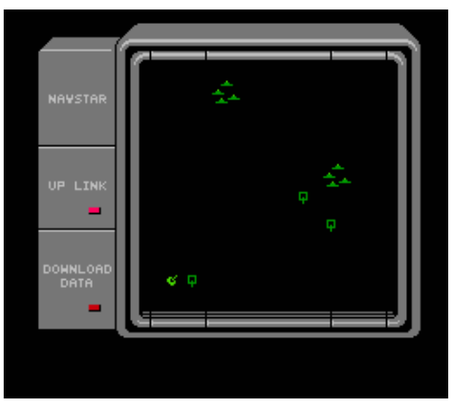
Notable Quotable:

"Pulling off a first-person perspective in an NES game is definitely an achievement, even

if not unprecedented . . . The handling of the map system could have been better. The learning curve is a bit steep. The game outside of the battlefield left a fair bit to be desired. The ending was a letdown . . .replay value was just not that great." —FreezeNet (www.freezenet.ca)

Notable Quotable:

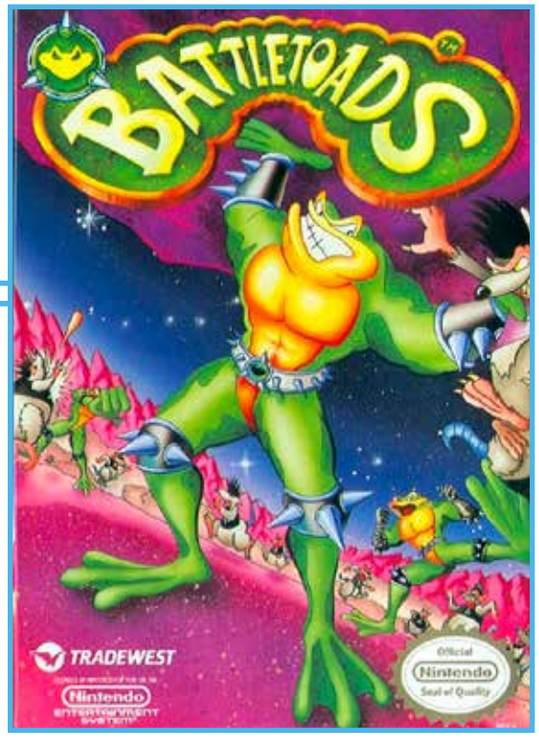
"I really doubt it qualifies as an authentic tank sim, but I think I enjoyed my time with *Battletank* . . . There was something strangely Zen about the whole experience . . . While you can press start to bring up the map and find the location of the enemy, I recommend just driving around for a while and pondering the meaning of your existence. At the very least *Battletank* feels different than most NES action games. I respect that." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Battletoads

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Love it or hate it, *Battletoads* is an infamously difficult but nicely designed, good-looking game with nice animation and plenty of humor. You play as one of two [illegible]ized, anthropomorphic toads (Zitz or Rash—Pimple has been kidnapped), each of whom must punch, slam, and kick his way through a bevy of rodents, ravens, pigs, mutants, innovative bosses, and other baddies, jumping over or otherwise avoiding chasms, whirlpools, logs, mines, missiles, meteorites, and other obstacles along the way. The variety-filled action incorporates ropes (for rappelling), weaponry (you can shoot at times), humorous animations, and much more. There are even vehicles to ride in especially harrowing side-scrolling sequences, including a speed bike, a jet turbo, and a space board.

Notable Quotable:
"*Battletoads* masquerades as a one-player game, but is essentially impossible to play alone. This beat-em'-up requires help, but in a ridiculous design flaw—in our opinion—the co-op players can do damage to each other . . . Too often in *Battletoads* we inadvertently killed our friends while fiercely trying to stay alive in its crazy speed levels. Why put us through this? Because as hard as the game is, it doesn't detract from how well it's made and how much fun you'll have playing with a friend. Making it through a level felt like an accident, and left us looking at our buddies like we just got away with something illegal." —Kyle Lowe (www.complex.com)

Notable Quotable:
"We usually are not fans of action games, but *Battletoads* is truly exceptional." —*Dragon* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"A refreshing and original game . . .brilliantly designed to allow you to get just a little bit farther each time you play . . .definitely one of the best Nintendo games I've played for quite a while." —*Mean Machines* (April 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"*Battletoads* has it all: charismatic characters, gorgeous graphics, innovative play options, a perfectly balanced difficulty level, and a wonderfully insane sense of humor." —*VideoGames & Computer Entertainment* (June 1993)

Insider Insight: Growing up, I knew a lot of people who owned the notoriously difficult *Battletoads*. Just about every time I went to a new friend's house they had the game, and we would play it. Unfortunately, it always ended in the same result—we couldn't beat level three, the dreaded Turbo Tunnel. No matter how hard we tried to beat this hellish level we never got to the end.

Last year, I was determined to finally beat the level. With the help of online tips, maybe I could finally get through the Turbo Tunnel. Two days and six tries later, I managed to pull off this feat. I was so excited and proud of myself that I couldn't wait to tell everyone I knew. But it was time to play level four. Since I had never progressed that far I had no idea what to expect. Unfortunately, I played poorly and only lasted a few minutes. I can't imagine how much harder this game gets and I may never find out. —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

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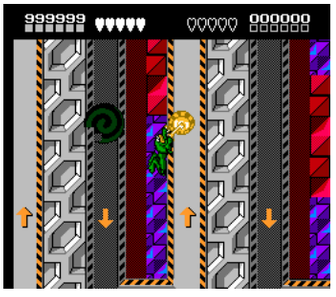
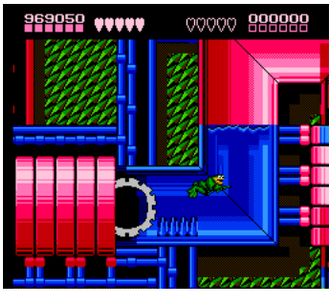
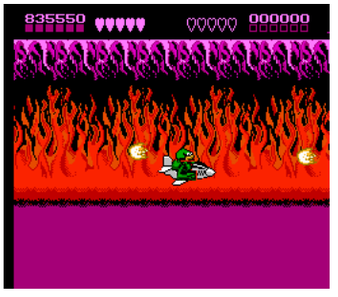






Battletoads/Double Dragon—The Ultimate Team

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993

The sequel to *Battletoads*, this game is an improvement, offering tighter controls, less frustrating gameplay, and richer, more detailed graphics. There are five playable characters in this epic, humor-infused beat-'em-up: Zitz, Rash, and Pimple from the Battletoads universe, who execute such moves as Big Bad Boot and Slide Slam; and Bill and Jimmy Lee, a.k.a. the Double Dragon Twins, who perform a variety of kicks, punches, spins, and throws. All are fun to take into battle against such memorable enemies as Abobo, Big Blag, Linda Lash, Shadow Boss, and the Dark Queen. Obstacles to avoid include astro boulders, homing missiles, electro barriers, and machine guns. The brawling action, which incorporates spelunking and speed biking into the mix, takes place across the top of the massive Colossus spaceship, in the bowels of said ship, and atop a missile headed straight for Earth. Weapons are limited, but you can throw dynamite, hurl certain enemies, and wield enemy Walkers' legs (after busting up the Walker). The ability for Toads and Dragons to hit one another can be turned off or on, the latter creating the potential for some truly knuckle-worthy competition. Released late in the life of the NES so it is hard to find.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

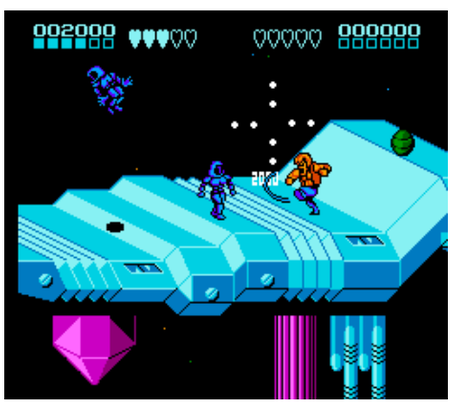
"Uses the best cooperative interface I've seen on an NES game! The ability to gang up on an enemy has been taken to new limits with this fast action masterpiece. The only problem is the enormously cheap kills in many areas, like being knocked into pits and unblockable attacks." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1993)

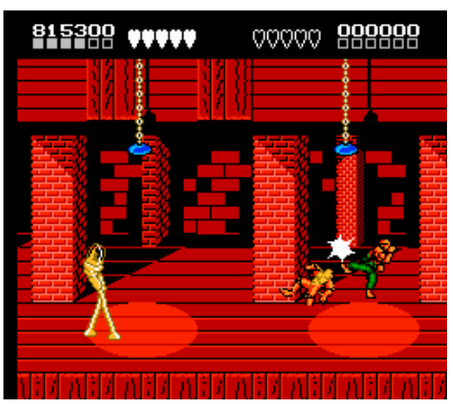
Notable Quotable:

"A tremendously entertaining beat-'em-up . . .about as good as a game can get on the NES—the gameplay is superb, the difficulty level is well-balanced, and the characters are among the most popular ever created specifically for a video game. The amount of graphical detail in the game is stunning . . . The only thing that keeps this game from earning a perfect '10' in the graphics department is the persistent flickering of objects and parts of characters' bodies . . .it would be a crime not to mention the game's meaty soundtrack, which punctuates the jittery music with digitized punching and kicking sounds." —*VideoGames & Computer Entertainment* (June 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The game's look will be familiar to *Double Dragon* disciples but it'll make the *Battletoads* brood want to croak. The overall design, including backgrounds and cinema scenes, doesn't have the same pizazz found in the original NES *Battletoads*. Instead, it tends to follow the more traditional route of the *Double Dragon* pix—a flat, 2D appearance and almost robotic animation. Parts of the sprites disappear in blocks during hectic fighting scenes, and the colors aren't as vibrant as those in either of the original games . . . The graphics are underpowered, but the visuals manage to grow on you thanks to some 'toadally' cool-looking fighting techniques and acrobatic moves . . . Smart-looking special moves include a stomping technique where your character uses a staff to literally pound a bad guy through the floor . . . The sounds have a frog in their throat . . . At least the music has plenty of energy . . . These guys make a great team, and they've fired up a rousing fighting adventure. If you can live with the graphics, *Battletoads/Double Dragon* makes the NES a mean-and-green fighting machine." —*GamePro* (June 1993)





Bee 52

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1992

One of the better unlicensed games for the NES that was not created by Teng[illegible] *Bee 52* has players maneuver the titular f[illegible]sect as it flies around gardens, swamps, [illegible]rds, collecting nectar from flowers to keep Really Nice Honey from going out of business. A honey pot meter at the bottom of the screen tracks how much honey is needed and how much you have collected. When the pot is full the level is complete. There's also a timer down there. Slugs, grasshoppers, grubs, spiders, and other cute enemies make Bee 52's job a challenge, but the brave bee can fend them off with its stinger and a spitting projectile attack. In addition, the bee can utilize such power-ups as bombs, rapid reload, a super sting, and a junior bee (which increases your firepower and shields Bee 52). Most power-ups are gained by shooting a Pick-Up Carrier who leaves behind a bubble when shot. To grab the power-up fly into the bubble. Ants can steal your honey, and watch out for water sprayed from lawn sprinklers. Beautiful outdoor environments and unusual gameplay make *Bee 52* a keeper.

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Notable Quotable:

"*Bee 52* is rather simple in gameplay but fun to play nonetheless." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Because of its theme *Bee 52* might initially appeal only to younger players. And despite its interesting scrolling backgrounds the graphics are only average. The unique theme and 24 levels help, but play control can be a bit tricky, so it's best to 'bee' patient and not let its simplicity 'bug' you." —*Gameplayers* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"There's no music in the levels! This really disappointed me, because the first two tracks on the title screen were great and catchy . . . *Bee 52* really could have been a fun game. It has the graphics and concept to go far in the world that it was in. However, lack of variety and unresponsive controls really bring down the fun factor . . . Playing through the first level is fun, but everything else is the same thing. It's like an old stick of gum." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics in this game are actually pretty good, especially for a game by Codemasters . . .the grass looks really nice . . . The sound is awful. Nearly all the sound effects are completely stock, taken out of other, better games . . .music is completely non-existent . . . The controls are alright . . . *Bee 52* is a speed demon. He flies pretty fast for a Nintendo game. You'll find yourself flying into unforeseen obstacles all the time, especially the spiders . . .hard but not in a good way." —TheMegaNerd (YouTube)

Beetlejuice

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Overhead View Action, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

A misstep by usually reliable Rare (though a poor game by LJN is certainly no rarity), *Beetlejuice* is loosely based on Tim Burton's 1988 feature film, but it looks more like the animated series (1989–1991). You guide "the ghost with the most" as he runs, jumps, and stomps his way through The Village, Storm Drains, The Maitlands' House (which includes basement, kitchen, living rooms, attic, and model graveyard), The Attic, and Afterlife Waiting Room. By stomping on beetles, collecting poison bottles, and destroying ghosts, whirling skulls, and other enemies, Beetlejuice can collect "help vouchers" for use in purchasing "scares," such as Medusa heads for freezing floating skulls, a Birdman for jumping high, and umbrella heads for defeating the octopus. Fans of the film may want this cartridge, especially boxed and complete, but blind jumps, lousy controls, commonplace enemies that are impervious to certain attacks, and other examples of poor programming will alienate most gamers.

Memories: When Burton's *Beetlejuice* hit theaters I took a date to see it. I absolutely loved the absurdist humor, weird horror, and general strangeness of the film. I've seen it many times since. As for my date? She said, "It was . . .different," with a less than complimentary look on her face. Needless to say, we didn't go out much after that.

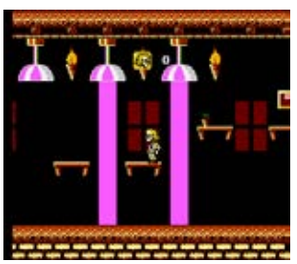
Notable Quotable:

"*Beetlejuice* tries to convey the whimsical macabre of the humor of the 1988 film, but it's a mess . . . There's little room for error, and momentum tends to carry you into harm's way . . .riddled with technical flaws. There's a delay before the screen scrolls, as if the game's struggling to keep up with the action. If the floor scrolls slightly out of view you can suddenly fall through the bottom of the screen. When pouncing on large bugs you can't tell if you're hurting them or they're hurting you." —Dave Mrozek (www.videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are ugly to look at and, though the music can be somewhat catchy, its upbeat and bubbly tone is anything but reminiscent of the dark comedy on which the game is based. *Beetlejuice* is perhaps marginally better than LJN's *Bill & Ted's Excellent Video Game Adventure*—if only because *Beetlejuice*'s bad controls are a relative step up from the unplayability of *Bill & Ted*—but it still sits alongside *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* on NES as one of LJN's greatest crimes against the most beloved of 8-bit consoles." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Insider Insight: I like to believe Rare developed *Beetlejuice* with the best of intentions. It couldn't be just a cash grab movie tie-in, could it? Although, if it was developed and released quickly to benefit from the *Beetlejuice* movie, *Beetlejuice* cartoon, and *Beetlejuice* toys trend, that might explain why it didn't live up to the hype. I jumped in the line and rocked my body in time to get just about every *Beetlejuice* brand item I could, from the pull-string doll to the skeleton hand slot machine. Yes, even that weird mashup toy was more satisfying than the NES game. At first I thought the game fell short because it was just too challenging. It took me forever to figure out how to get through the first level, and I died enough to create my own handbook for the recently deceased with notes on each level. When you invest that much time in such a clunky game, which kills you even when you jump exactly where you're supposed to, you expect a well-earned ending. An epic boss battle. A dance off with a sandworm. Something. Nope. I walked through a door to see what was on the other side, and instead of finding the afterlife, I found the credits. Bummer, bummer, bummer. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Best of the Best Championship Karate

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain
DEVELOPER: Movie Software
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992

Loosely based on the 1989 feature film, which was simply called *Best of the Best*, *Best of the Best Championship Karate* features 32 different types of hits and kicks, each of which the player creates or selects and will have at his command. The action moves slowly but is strategic in nature, as a mix of moves works better than mere button mashing. In addition, striking good blows depends on a number of factors, including the power of the blow, the proximity of the fighters, and the part of the body that was hit. Fighters are ranked according to strength, reflexes, and resistance, and can improve these stats by training. The odd color scheme consists of blue lighting, purple onlookers, and a green ring.

Notable Quotable:

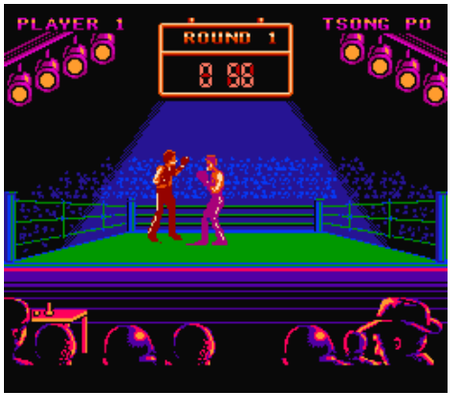
"Nothing really appealing to look at . . . I can't describe how bad this game controls. You really have to feel for yourself . . .character animations are pretty smooth." —Drink a Beer and Play a Game (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The action moves at a snail's pace and controlling your character is a chore, causing him to get knocked down too often. While the fighters' animation is smooth, the color choices, such as a green ring and blue lighting, are odd and seem out of place. The lack of music or crowd noise during matches makes for a not-very-exciting atmosphere." —Glenn Wigmore (formerly at alllgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

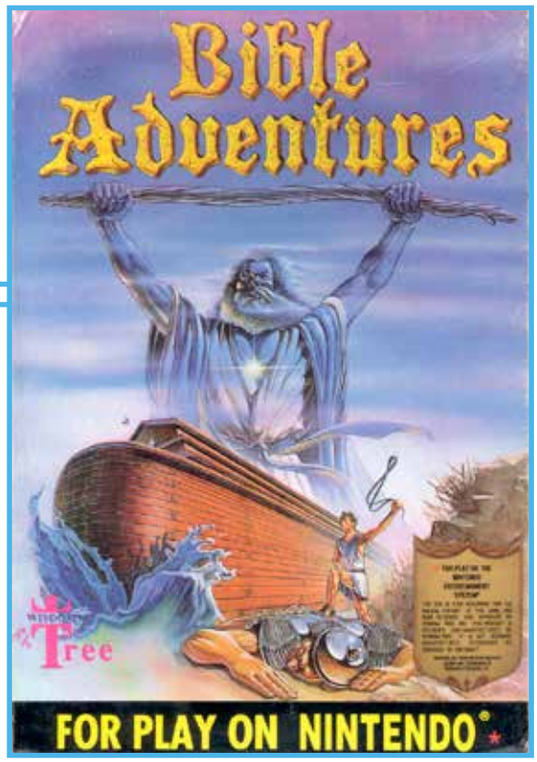
"It's hard for me to get any pleasure out of a fighting simulator with just two buttons that barely respond. The character animations are nice, but it doesn't matter when my player's actions take forever to connect with my opponent. And I could never tell if I was hitting the other player or not. The only move I could do repeatedly was to trip my opponent, but doing so would always make the match stop for a couple seconds." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Bible Adventures

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree
DEVELOPER: Wisdom Tree
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



With three games based on stories from the *Old Testament*, *Bible Adventures* aims to please Christian parents more than it does kids or video game enthusiasts. In Noah's Ark and David and Goliath you must pick up and carry various animals to a specific location. David and Goliath, of course, adds a giant to battle with a slingshot. In Baby Moses, you carry the infant Moses until you can put him in a raft for safekeeping. Each segment plays like a (very) poor man's *Super Mario Bros. 2*. Gameplay consists of running, jumping, climbing, delivering items, picking up and throwing objects, and avoiding scorpions, lions, soldiers, and other enemies. Bible verses appear throughout each game.

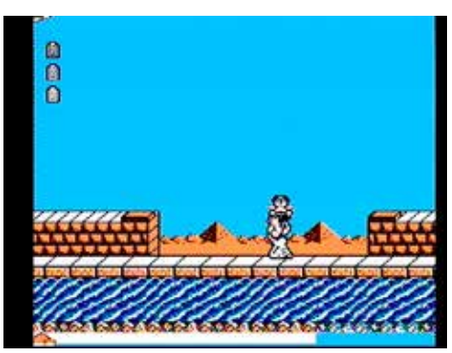
The biggest problem with all three games is that they're too difficult for younger kids and too dull for older ones. This unlicensed cartridge holds the distinction of being the first religion-themed console game.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are excellent and very cute throughout all the games. I'm especially impressed with the opening character slides on the menu screen—cartoony, but still very detailed for the NES. Moses looks cute enough to throw into the river. The background music is not quite so impressive . . . I appreciate that it's not a 'Christianizing' of another work . . . Not the best Biblical teaching tool but a non-offensive game for the kids." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Who would have thought a company could actually go through the trouble of creating several non-licensed NES games for the sole purpose of teaching theology? Isn't going behind the backs of Nintendo a sin in itself, making the very creation of this game hypocrisy by nature? But wait—there's a bit of a 'miracle' here as well. None of the Christian-based games by Bible-conscious game designer Wisdom Tree are all that bad! And of those I've played, *Bible Adventures* is the best of the bunch . . . The graphics are pretty good, with all creatures great and small being animated . . . There are a few glitches . . . I can't remember the last time I saw a koala bear climb into thin air, but it happens regularly in this game . . . The sound is downright awful, with very little variety. The background hymn drones on and on and on. *Bible Adventures* isn't going to part your Red Sea, but it also isn't easy to find, so as a collectible consider it a toughie of sorts." —Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bible Buffet

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree
DEVELOPER: Wisdom Tree
GAME TYPE: Board Game/Maze Shooter, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993

Originally packaged with a trivia book, *Bible Buffet* is a video board game in which each player spins a spinner, moves around a map screen and, depending on what square they are landed upon, spins again, answers three questions (from the aforementioned book), moves ahead or back extra spaces, or enters a brief overhead view maze/action scene. The maze game has players using spoons, knives, forks, and preservatives to battle and collect various foods. The objective in this game is to finish first, collect the most food, and/or correctly answer the most questions. Includes voice samples and a solid instrumental rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In" during the title screen. This unlicensed game was released late in the life of the NES and is very hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"A strange hybrid of board game and simplistic platformer. You can play this with up to four players, which is pretty amazing considering there were hardly any licensed games that allowed four players . . . Each square has a different world contained within, and there's a good number of worlds and squares within the game, so the replay value is strangely high . . . Progressing through the levels is a cinch . . .infinitely more playable than *Bible Adventures*, and while the levels are easy, they're strangely compelling." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"An inoffensive little board game for kids, with occasional scripture quizzes coming at you if you land on specific board spaces. But any lack of knowledge and verses won't matter, since success only gives you a few extra stars/points at the end. The real question is if you'll bother to get that far . . . Controls are adequate . . . Graphics aren't so hot. I couldn't easily figure out what each item was supposed to be . . . The game sections aren't very exciting, and the quiz sections rely on a printed question booklet that came with the cartridge. If you don't have the book you're relegated to circling random answers and hoping for the best . . . In the end it's typical Wisdom Tree—a lazy game with the sole intent to get shelf space in Christian bookstores." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

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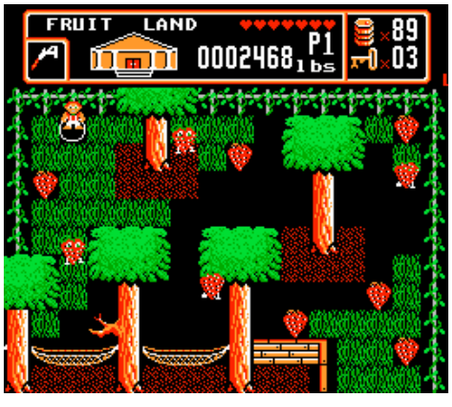
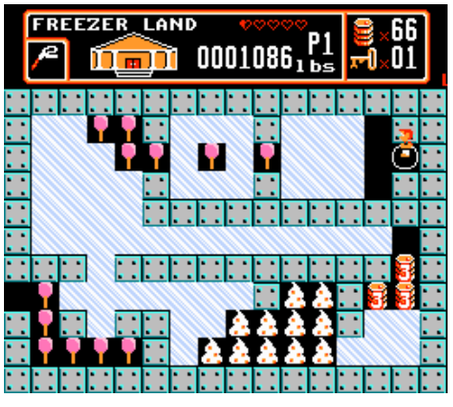
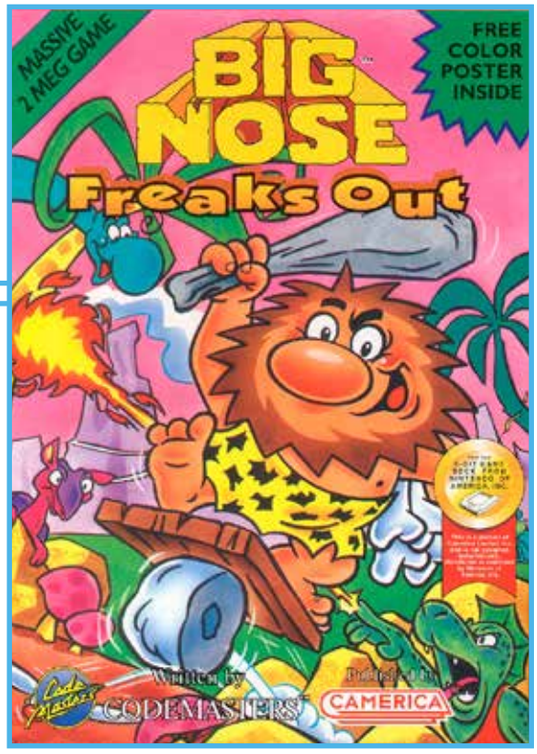
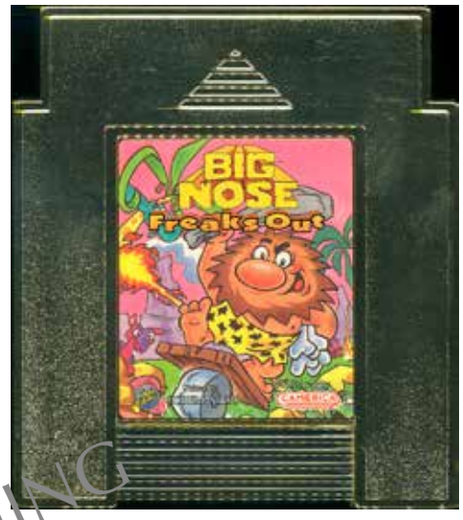




Big Nose Freaks Out

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992





The sequel to *Big Nose the Caveman*, *Big Nose Freaks Out* is a faster game than its progenitor thanks to a new mode of transportation: a wheel board that speeds Big Nose through each level like a Sonic the Hedgehog wannabe (by way of *BC's Quest for Tires* for the ColecoVision). On a mission to recover stolen bones scattered throughout five prehistoric levels filled with hills, trees, caves, slopes, chasms, and platforms, Bignose must use his trusty club and rocks to battle dinosaurs and other enemies, some of which pop up unexpectedly, leading to cheap hits. Level warps, boss battles, hidden areas to explore, and treasures to gather complement the action nicely. Available as a standard-sized game and as a compact cartridge for the Aladdin Deck Enhancer. Unlicensed and hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"Reeks of mediocrity . . .generic worlds with happy-go-lucky music . . . The game feels buggy, partly because certain doors and mushrooms are completely invisible. And how is it that you can hop on cloud outlines? The bonus screen is called the 'Bone Us' screen, prompting some serious eye-rolling on my part. I can see why Big Nose is freaking out; he's living in a virtual hell." —Dave Mozek (videogamecritic.com)

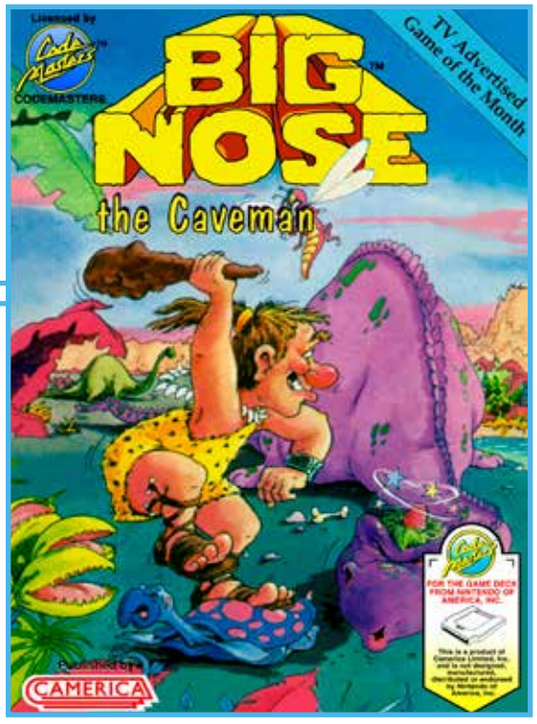
Notable Quotable:

"His world is much more open-ended this time . . . No longer do you just go in a straight line across each level with reckless bludgeoning abandon . . . In some areas the bones are hidden in insane places that you will only find through trial and error. It gives the game some longevity, which is appreciated, but truthfully, I can't see anybody but the most die-hard *Big Nose* fans wanting to 'collect them all' . . . The game seems a lot more forgiving this time . . . None of the enemies is that challenging, but the levels can get confusing the farther you progress. I have to give Camerica credit: this is a slight improvement on the first game. Since the first *Big Nose* was popular enough that it warranted a sequel, I'm surprised they decided to add any new gameplay elements when they could have just swapped some level palettes, added some different enemies, and called it a day." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Big Nose the Caveman

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991



In this fun but minor platformer, you control a short, big-nosed caveman who runs and jumps across the gaps and onto the platforms (cliffs, clouds, tree branches, and [illegible]) of four prehistoric island worlds: [illegible]ise, Monster, Terror, and Chaos. Armed with a club, the caveman must fend off pterodactyls, triceratops, spiders, sea serpents, turtles (who sometimes act as stepping stones), cobras, and other enemies. Grabbing rocks levels-up Bignose so he can fire projectiles, making his job easier. Collecting bones gives Bignose currency for use in purchasing spells. Certain areas feature forced scrolling while others find Bignose using his club like a propeller. An Aladdin Deck Enhancer compact cartridge version was advertised but not released. Unlicensed and hard to find.

Notable Quotable:
"An adequate genre effort with large characters, flat backgrounds, and uninteresting environments." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"It's aimed more towards the younger Nintendo freak, with simpler gameplay and lots of animation to marvel at." —*N-Force* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"The SuperChip graphics are colorful and flicker-free, although they do suffer from occasional slowdown . . .a moderately fun, highly challenging island adventure." —*GamePro* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Camerica and Codemasters double-teamed for this game, much like they did for the charming day-in-the-life bee simulator *Bee 52*. The latter was a far superior game. Even though both *Big Nose* and *Bee 52* are, at their core, simplistic platforming games, the concept behind *Bee 52* was unique and interesting for its time. *Big Nose* is just another me-too platformer in a market already besieged by mediocre platformers." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

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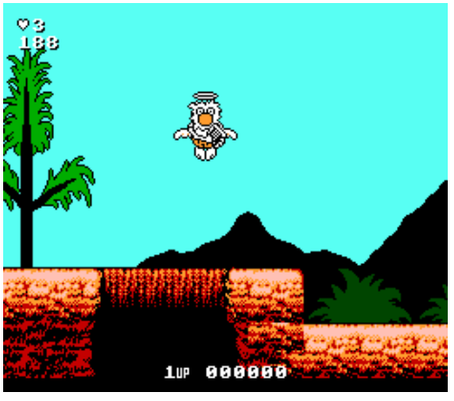
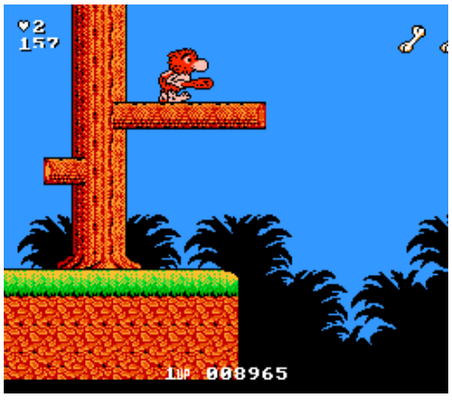
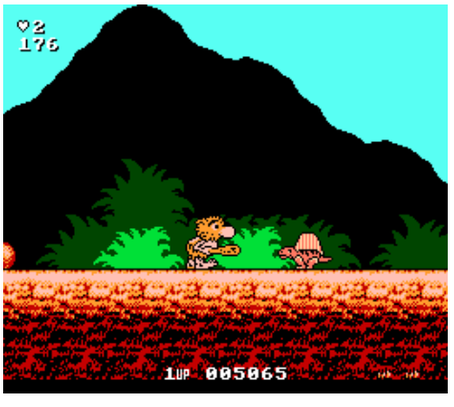
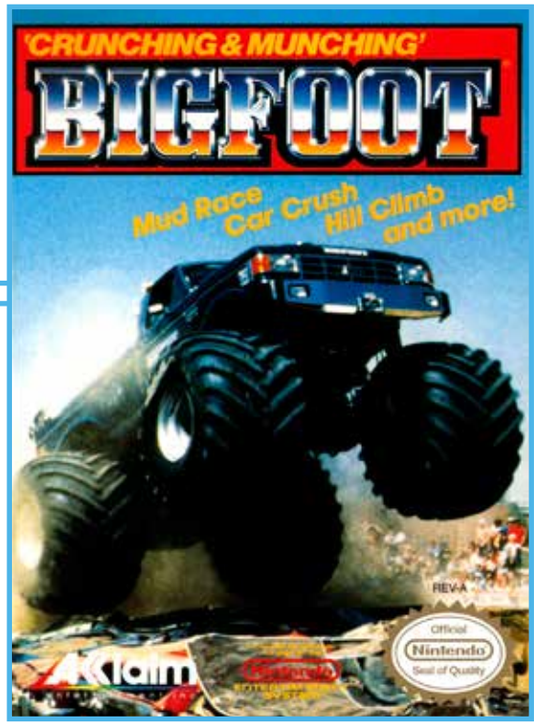






Bigfoot

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Monster Truck Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



A top-down, cross-country race from Los Angeles to New York, *Bigfoot* puts players behind the wheel of a monster truck, driving up the screen, jumping, crushing vehicles, avoiding water slicks, grinding through mud hills, collecting cash (for purchasing tires, a bigger engine, transmission work, and an upgraded suspension), and grabbing power-ups (including a circular saw, shields, and nitro boosts). At stops along the route the action switches to a thumb-numbing side-view event: Car Crush, Mud Race, Hill Climb, Tractor Pull, Car Crush Drag Race, or Oyster Bay Championship Drag Race.

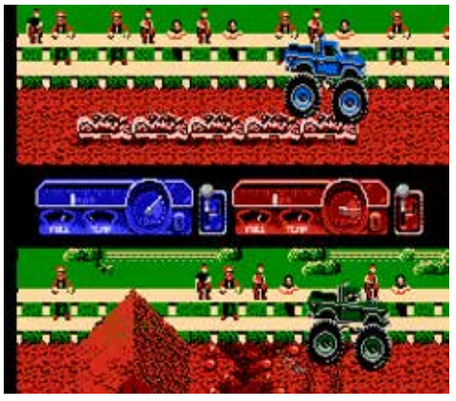
Notable Quotable:
"Is it pretty to look at? Not particularly. Is the gameplay repetitive? Of course. Are the controls unintuitive and confusing? Sure." —Game Dave (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"The game is overly repetitious, but the competitive nature of the events makes it fun for two players. The trucks are satisfactorily rendered, but the horrible sound effects leave something to be desired." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Controlling your truck in this game is as random as anything. I felt like it was flying across the screen every time it knocked into something, and don't even get me started on what happens when the other car collides into you. It was like a freaking pinball machine watching this monster truck race game in action." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*Bigfoot* really disappointed me. I was a fan of *Power Drive* in the arcades, which this game approximates, but even with a dozen rounds of play and multiple events I finished the cart the first time I played it . . . The graphics are adequate, but not spectacular, and the events, although varied, aren't challenging enough to hold interest . . . The voice is the best on the NES." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1990)

Insider Insight: As a kid I didn't have my own Nintendo system. I got games to play with my uncle, or at my neighbor's house. My neighbor called me over whenever he got a new game, but only if it was what he thought of as chick friendly. He had a whole stash of guy games I didn't know about until I walked in on a dude date. A bunch of boys were gathered around the tiny television in his bedroom and cool cartridges were scattered all over the floor, including *Bigfoot*. It was an opportunity for me to prove there's no game a girl can't play. It's muddy, fast-paced, and competitive, and you could really be a jerk to the other player. I remember when we figured out you could crush a cow for cash. It was like a preview for *Grand Theft Auto*. In *Bigfoot*, you did whatever you had to for the win. We played knockout tournament style and kept a high score record. Trash talk was tough and the stakes were high. I won myself a lot of baseball cards and Pogs that summer. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bill & Ted's Excellent Video Game Adventure

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Rocket Science Games
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

An extension of the 1989 movie *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, this game lets players control Bill or Ted (depending on the level) as they travel back in time to rescue Cleopatra, Al Capone, Elvis, Sitting Bull, and other historical figures. Friends throughout the game provide clues and items while foes (including "crazy jailer dudes") can be distracted or eliminated with such items as text books, dynamite, pudding, and cassette tapes. Worlds to explore include Medieval, Western, Colonial, Medieval 2, Modern, and Ancient. The action is viewed from an isometric perspective, meaning the characters are somewhat difficult to control. Also the clues can be baffling, making certain people and items hard to locate. The maps in the manual can help.

Notable Quotable:

"A major disappointment. A total flop from beginning to end. The graphics are heinous and the sound effects are most annoying . . .horrible gameplay that makes it very un-fun to play. This is far from being excellent. Most upsetting." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The guys look and talk just like their excellent movie-selves . . . The story's fun, too . . . There are some weak spots in the game, however . . . It isn't easy finding items, which means you spend ages wandering around, and that's frustrating . . . Control is awkward too." —*Nintendo Power* (July 1991)

Insider Insight: As many people know, video games based on movies are often terrible on the NES. Unfortunately this holds true with *Bill & Ted's Excellent Video Game Adventure*. I love the film, which is why I was excited to experience the game when it came out. The game is of course loosely based on the franchise, as you use your phone book and time machine to visit various historical figures and place historical items in their proper time period. Sounds simple enough, right? Well, the execution of the game falls short of the mark. The first time I picked up a controller to play this game I experienced some of the most poorly controlled characters in any NES game—the weird isometric view certainly doesn't help. After wasting money on this game back in the day I wanted to build myself a time machine so I could go back and tell myself *not* to rent it! —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

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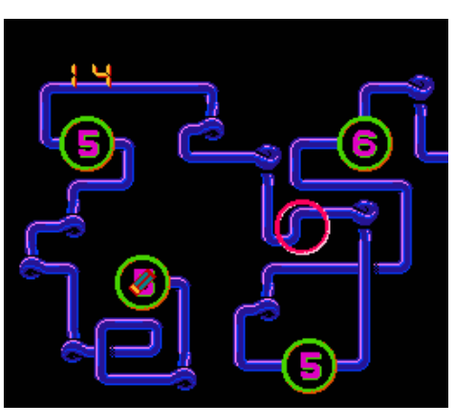
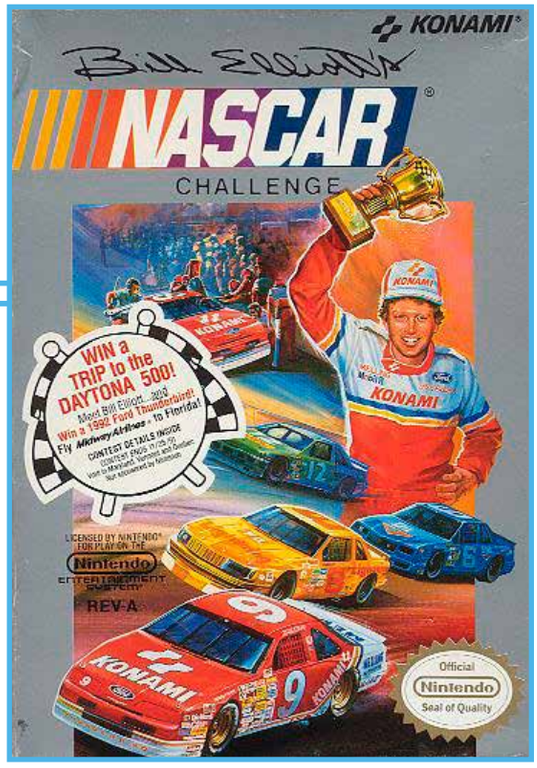


Bill Elliot's NASCAR Challenge

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Distinctive Software
GAME TYPE: Stock Car Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Viewed from inside the cockpit of the car (the bottom ⅔ of the screen shows the steering wheel and instrument panel), *Bill Elliot's NASCAR Challenge* lets players select from three cars—Pontiac Grand Prix, Ford Thunderbird, and Chevrolet Lumina—for racing on two types of tracks: high banked ovals (Daytona and Talladega) and challenging road courses (Sears Point and Watkins Glen). Prior to hitting the pavement players can customize their vehicle in terms of tires, gear ratio, spoiler angle, transmission (automatic or manual), and engine (racing or qualifying). During races, which are against 15 other drivers, the backgrounds are simplistic and players can only see a short distance ahead. Numerous strategic considerations, including pitting, following a good line, and drafting (positioning the car in the vacuum behind the leader), provide players with a relatively authentic racing experience. Co-designed by Elliot himself, this was the first NASCAR-licensed console game.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Bill Elliott is delivered in a NASCAR racing game that has a few good effects but never manages to wrap them together with good technique." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1991)

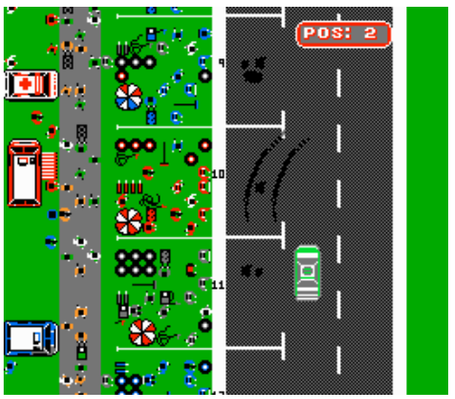
Notable Quotable:

"*Bill Elliott's NASCAR Challenge* lives up to its title, providing authentic and detailed racing action. Definitely a must-have for racing fans." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

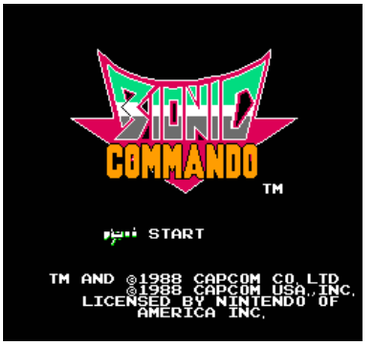
"Racing in this game is done through the perspective of the driver, and I have to say it's not badly done for an NES game. It's just a shame that the graphics couldn't be a little bit better . . . All the cars look like flattened pick-up trucks, and the scenery looks like a pixelated mess. You do get a rearview mirror, though. I suppose that's helpful . . . Do all NES racing games have the same irritating tire squeal?? At least the music was semi-decent. Gives the game a nice late-'80s techno vibe." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight: I've always been nervous in cars. When I was younger, I had an intense fear of dying in a crash. I even put off getting my license until I was 21. My phobia contributed to my fascination with NASCAR. Why would anyone willingly speed around a track and risk wrecking? My dad would watch NASCAR, and I could never tell if people were more invested in supporting a winner or waiting for car carnage. My approach to racing games reflected this mix of terror and intrigue. I would mash buttons and do a lot of panicked yelling, squeezing my eyes closed when collision seemed imminent. I couldn't appreciate the finesse of *Bill Elliott's NASCAR Challenge* or the skill involved in strategic play. Except when I somehow miraculously won, then I was an expert on automotive inertia and directional pad pressure. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*



Bionic Commando

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



In *Bionic Commando* the protagonist cannot jump, making for some unusual (if enjoyable) platforming action. The titular s[illegible]uses an extendable bionic arm that can latch onto surfaces to swing or pull him forward. Unlike the arcade original (Capcom, 1987), the NES version features vertical scrolling stages; permits necessary for entering certain areas; and a stage selection map. Armed with a normal gun, the soldier can add a wide gun, a rocket gun, a three-way gun, a machine gun, and a hyper bazooka to his arsenal. Enemies to shoot include suicide bombers, helicopters, gunners, laser cannons, jeeps, giant soldiers, and more.

Notable Quotable:

"Fulfills every requirement for a video game . . .fast action, terrific graphics, and varied gameplay." —*Gameplayers* (June/July 1989)

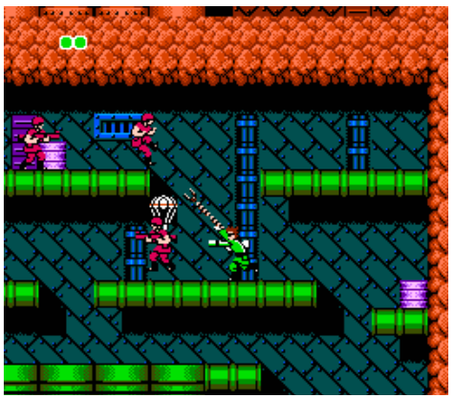
Notable Quotable:

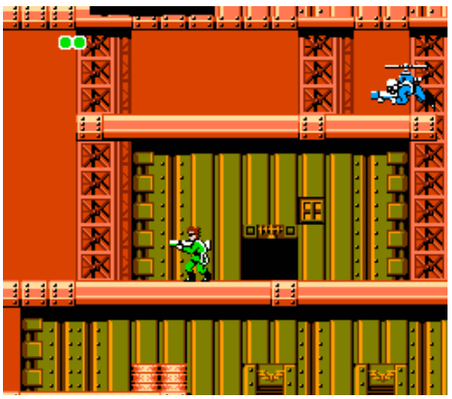
"One of the best war games around. It's exciting, requires that you master some complex moves, and has stunning graphics . . . The graphics show a lot of detail and are an excellent example of just what the NES is capable of displaying. The sound effects are equally good. The gunfire, for instance, is surprisingly realistic . . .extremely fast-paced . . .the characters look realistic and don't flicker." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Insider Insight: When my neighbor purchased *Bionic Commando* for his NES I was excited. Although I had never actually played the original Capcom arcade game, I did own the solid home conversion for the ZX Spectrum and had loved the grappling hook mechanic, the excellent Tim Follin music, and the all-out action gameplay. So imagine my shock when I visited my neighbor to discover that his *Bionic Commando* was totally different! This was the first time I had experienced a home version of a game being radically different from the arcade original. In fact, it was only in more recent years that I discovered this was actually commonplace on the NES.

The huge amount of changes from the version I loved immediately turned me off, and I watched him play while moaning about all the differences. But Martin kept insisting that I play for myself, as it was actually very good. Eventually I reluctantly gave in to see if he was telling the truth. Half an hour later I did something I wasn't really prepared for—I changed my mind! Could it be that this NES version of *Bionic Commando* was actually very good, and even better than the arcade original? Yes, it actually was! In fact, the game made such an impression on me that it's still among my favorite games on the system. —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

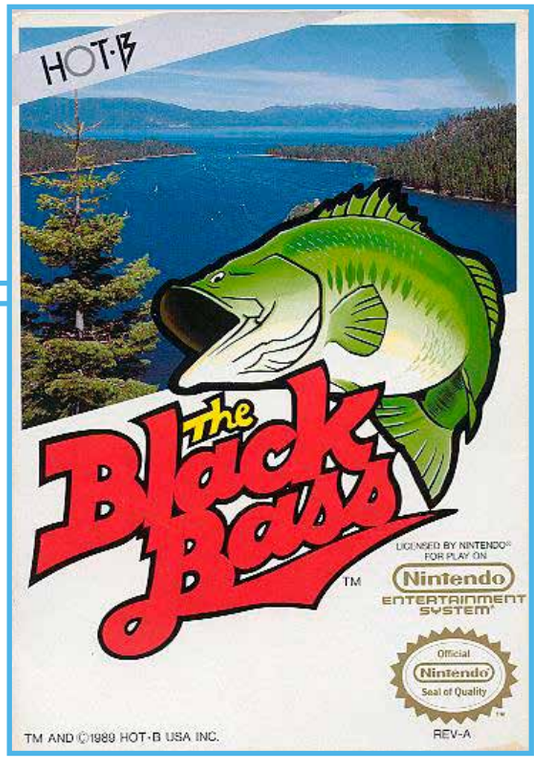
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

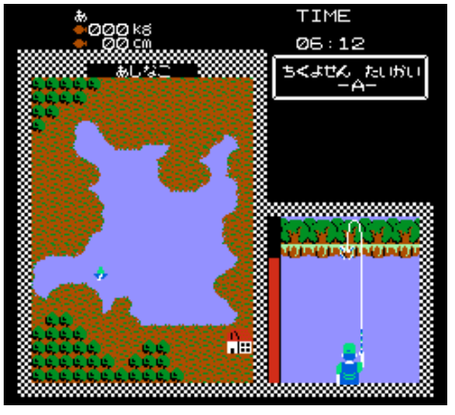




The Black Bass

PUBLISHER: Hot-B
DEVELOPER: Another
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player
YEAR: 1989





This fishing game has armchair anglers catching black bass, of course, but also brown trout, rainbow trout, and pike; however, only bass increases the player's score. There are four lakes to fish in (Lake Amada, Japan Lake, Lake More, and San Lake) and five types of lures (pencil bait, frogs, shallow runners, spinners, and plastic worms). You can catch bass with any type of lure (there appears to be some luck involved), but you should change the color of the lure according to weather conditions (a silver lure is good in clear weather, for example). The top-down gameplay consists of maneuvering your boat to the desired fishing spot (which is actually just picking a spot on the map), casting your line using a power meter, and moving the reel around to lure the fish. When you get a bite you must slowly reel the fish in, making sure to avoid obstacles (logs, weeds, and the like) and prevent the line from snapping. If a fish is especially aggressive you should release some line to tire the fish out. Once your total haul of fish is heavy enough you advance to the next lake. Musically, the game gets off to a nice, peppy start at the title screen, but devolves into a bunch of beeps (not to mention bleeps) and bloops during gameplay. The action can be slow and tedious (if a fish is far away, reeling it in can take a while), but the game is fairly fun and gets the job done considering the era—this was the first realistic take on the sport released in the US.

Notable Quotable:

"*The Black Bass* accurately captures many aspects of fishing, including lure selection, boat placement, and most importantly perseverance. The graphics and sounds are extremely basic, but the core gameplay is addictive. Each session is part of an ongoing tournament, giving players a reason to keep at it." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"These fish look fairly hideous with their freakishly large heads . . .long and tedious process if the fish is far away, which he usually is . . . If you've played any modern fishing games, *Black Bass* can be hard to stomach. There's almost nothing to see, and you can't turn off the horrible background music . . . The years have not been kind to this game, but its sequel, *The Blue Marlin*, has fared much better." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Playing this cartridge is sort of like watching Dan Rather read the news: you get what you tuned in for but yearn for a little excitement now and then! Unlike real fishing, where at the very least you get some sun and fresh air, this cartridge is a complete yawn for anyone but the devoted rod and reeler . . .excellent splashing water sounds . . .if a software company wants to give us another fishing game let's have Ahab chasing the white whale." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Blackjack

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Odyssey Software
GAME TYPE: Gambling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992

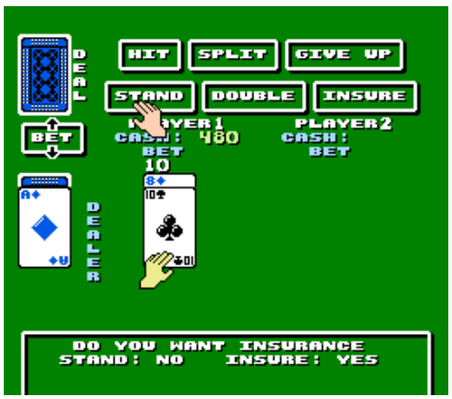
Unlike *Las Vegas Poker & Blackjack* for the Intellivision and *Ken Uston Blackjack/Poker* for the ColecoVision—both of which are from the previous generation of consoles and both of which depict a nicely drawn and animated dealer—*Blackjack* for the NES has decidedly simplistic visuals, offering little more than white text, a hand cursor, a solid green background, and five different selectable card designs. In addition, there is no poker option. Fortunately, the game is a nicely programmed version of "21," letting you double down, split pairs, make insurance bets, modify the number of decks (1–3), set the table limit ($1,000 to $10,000), change the amount of your starting cash ($100 to $500), and draw five card Charlies. The cards are dealt from a "dealing shoe" which consists of one, three, or five decks of cards. Unlicensed and rare.

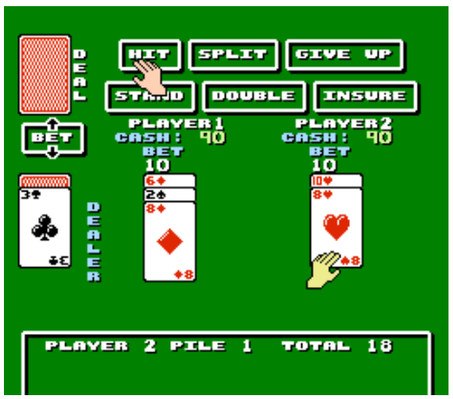
Memories: When we were kids, my brother and I would play blackjack with good, old-fashioned, Bicycle brand playing cards. Later, I played virtual renditions of the game on the Atari 2600 (*Blackjack*), Intellivision (*Las Vegas Poker & Blackjack*), and ColecoVision (*Ken Uston BlackJack/Poker*). Much more recently my son has gotten me into playing the game at actual casinos, such as Winstar in Thackerville, Oklahoma (so far I've lost more money than I've won—strictly small stakes). This NES version of the popular game is serviceable, but nothing beats the real deal (so to speak).

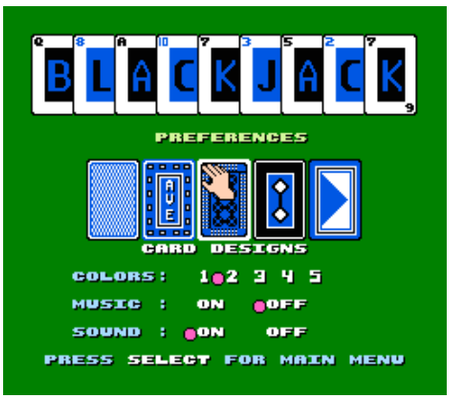
Notable Quotable:
"Because it's so simple, it can focus on adding the little features missing from more comprehensive casino games . . . It may not add up to much, but *Blackjack*'s clarity of vision stands out among a sea of convoluted, unfocused titles." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Pure, unadulterated blackjack for those who don't really like to gamble but love to pretend. Options are limited . . . This game sucked me in, but more than anything, it made me want to gamble with real money because virtual winnings just aren't good enough." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:
"In the early '90s, if you wanted to just play a simple game of electronic blackjack and didn't have a computer this was probably your best choice . . .no frills whatsoever other than choosing from five card designs . . . Aside from speed and ease of navigation, *Blackjack*'s main strength is in faithfully emulating pretty much all rules and options of the game . . . The interface is pretty good, keeping the dragging around, clicking, and pauses to a minimum . . .handles the basics as well as possible . . .spartan production values . . . a better game than nearly any other casino game on the NES." —Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)



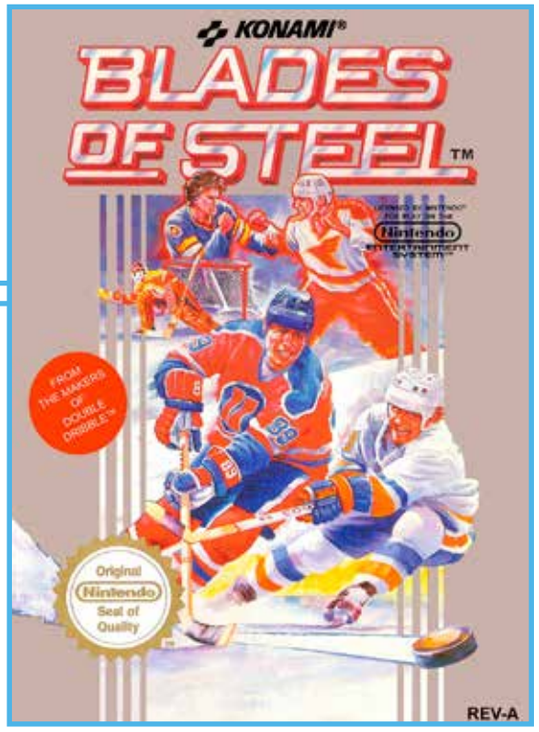




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Blades of Steel

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



One of the best, most exciting sports games of the 1980s, *Blades of Steel* is fast paced, six-on-six action featuring smooth skating, quick, crisp passing, and fu[illegible]hots on goal. There are face-offs, ic[illegible]alties, slashing, and checking, but if play gets too rough a fight will break out. This switches the game to a simple battle mode, which is a one-on-one, side-view slugfest that adds substantial enjoyment to an already fun game. If the ref intervenes before fists fly a penalty shot will be awarded. You can play Exhibition mode or enter a Tournament, each with three different difficulty options (junior, college, and pro), and you can select from eight generic teams: New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Minnesota. Each team has different strengths and weaknesses. Like its arcade counterpart (Konami, 1987), *Blades of Steel* for the NES helped usher in a new era of realism in sports video games.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics, although a bit flickery at times, are for the most part well-detailed with decent animation . . .the action is best appreciated with two players . . .but that's not to say *Blades of Steel* is a dull one-player game . . .a thoroughly enjoyable sports simulation." —*Mean Machines* (December 1990)

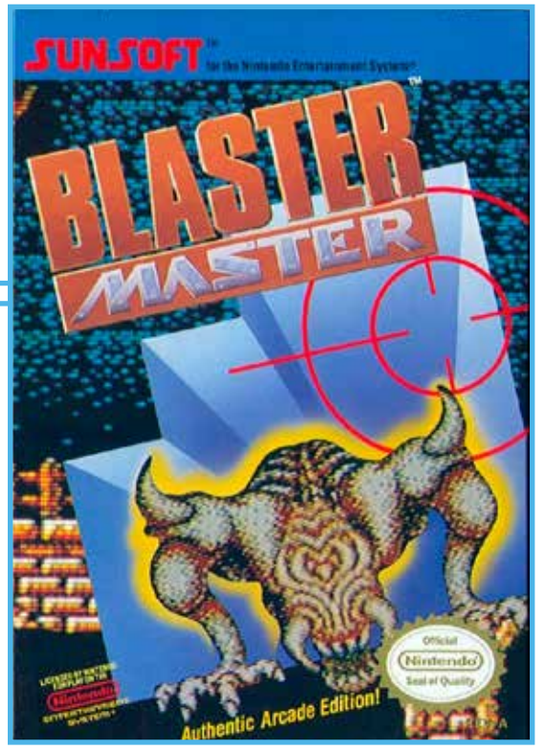
Insider Insight: Growing up in England, I wasn't into ice hockey. I didn't know anybody who played it and they certainly didn't show it on TV unless it was the Winter Olympics. I remember thinking that it was a sport that Canadians and Scandinavians played—I'm sure those of you in North America looked at popular British sports like cricket and rugby the same way. So when my neighbor Martin picked up *Blades of Steel* I was intrigued, not just because this was a sport I wasn't very familiar with, but also because he informed me that it was based on a Konami arcade game. Now *that* name I did know, as I regularly visited arcades and had enjoyed many of the company's games.

Martin knew the sport well from his years in America and was eager to introduce me, so he quickly set up a two-player game. From the moment it started up I was impressed by the presentation and excellent digitized speech, and it only got better from there. After a couple of pretty bad thrashings I started to get the hang of the game—after all, it was basically just our version of football but on ice! But the one thing that really grabbed my attention and very much set ice hockey apart from all other sports was that you could fight! What could be better than that—it was a sports game and a fighting game in one! Moreover, thanks to the greatness of *Blades of Steel*, I began collecting hockey games. —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Blaster Master

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Tokai Engineering
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



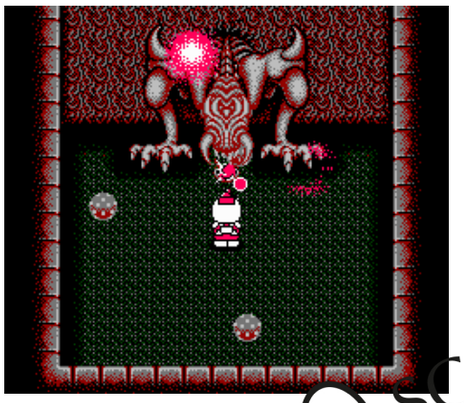
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

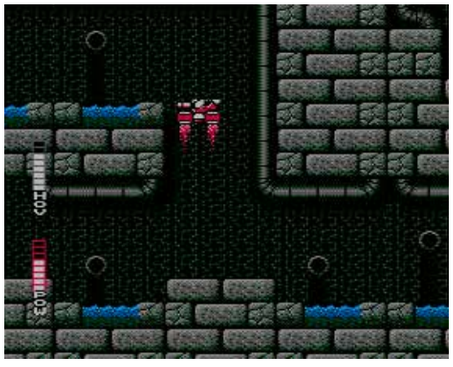
In *Blaster Master* you pilot the S.O.P.H.I.A. a tank-like vehicle that travels u[illegible] und through maze-like passages, usi[illegible]iles and other weapons to destroy mutants. After killing the boss of each level you will acquire such items as Hyper, which crushes walls; Hover, which enables the vehicle to reach higher areas; and Dive, which allows for free swimming under water. You can jump out of the vehicle to climb ladders, enter doorways, throw grenades, and more. Non-linear gameplay, richly textured graphics (including lots of greens and browns), and unusual gameplay make *Blaster Master* worth looking into.

Notable Quotable:

"The quality of the graphics varies within each stage and between stages. In secret rooms that Jason enters the detail is very crisp. Outside things tend to be a bit fuzzier. Confrontations with several of the giant mutant bosses are truly awesome and stunning . . .extremely difficult . . .a big game . . .a lot of fun." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

BLASTER MASTER!
Mega Graphics ▪ Mega Action
SUNSOFT™
By a strange accident, you've fallen down a hidden manhole, deep down into an unbelievable world . . . the eight Caverns of Doom! Inside this frightening environment, you encounter the Masters of the Caverns, slimy, screeching, steaming creatures ready to do you in. Their size is awesome — gigantic prehistoric specimens possessing supernatural powers! From the moment you encounter the first creature, you know it's destroy or be destroyed. It's a simple matter of survival . . . the need to blast your way through the endless maze of tunnels, searching for the secret caverns that offer your only means of escape.
mobile vehicle of uncanny possibilities. It can crush walls . . . has cannon power . . . can hover . . . open a door . . . dive and swim freely under water . . . move up and down along vertical walls . . . move upside down along ceilings! In addition, the Blaster Vehicle has a guided missile, a powerful electro-magnetic wave called Thunder Break and a multi-headed missile capable of shooting three missiles at one time. But don't forget, despite this formidable arsenal, your enemies will keep coming!
LET THE BATTLE BEGIN!
Piloting the Blaster Vehicle through the endless maze of the Caverns of Doom, you must be ever alert for the quick-attacking Masters of the Caverns. No sooner than you annihilate one, there is another creature to take its place. And **you** are always the target! Do you have the guts, the stamina, the determination to eliminate all the enemies and find your way out of these deep, dark caverns? Good luck, Blaster Master!





Insider Insight: *Blaser Master* is one of the best games I've ever played. Not just because it's super fun, or it's still one of the best-looking games on the system, or even because of its truly amazing soundtrack. What makes it personally amazing was how it introduced me to the concept of being rewarded for curiosity, and paying attention to details. At the start of the game there's a ledge you can't get to. It's completely unassuming, and I honestly figured it was just there for decoration. But having read the instruction manual, I knew that at some point I was going to get the hover ability and when I did, I was going to go back to that first screen in the game and see what was on top of that ledge. I expected it to be nothing, but I wanted to see that "nothing" for myself. It took me a long time to finally defeat the Area 3 boss and get the hover ability, but as planned, the first thing I did wasn't search for Area 4, it was head straight back to the beginning of the game. To my sheer bewilderment there *was* something up there! It was more hover fuel and a robot. And another ledge. And another. And a door. And that door lead to the entrance to Area 4! To this day it's one of my fondest video game memories and a fantastic example of excellent game design. A true classic through and through. – Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

Insider Insight: Sophia III is one of the greatest vehicle designs in the history of video games. As someone who has actually designed vehicles for video games, and as a gamer myself for nearly four decades, I can tell you that the influence of *Blaster Master* (originally *Meta Fight* on the Famicom) is felt in the game industry to this day. There are many reasons *Blaster Master* is rightfully esteemed as one of the greatest of all third-party titles in the NES library.

Blaster Master is basically a hybrid side-scrolling platformer and overhead dungeon crawler. The game's immense, non-linear overworld is played like a side-scroller, but instead of a running and jumping chump in overalls, the player controls a four-wheel drive mecha that's armed to the teeth with a massive laser cannon, missiles, lightning casters, hover jets, and some seriously beefed up suspension that allows the vehicle to jump. As the player works their way through the vast subterranean world, the game's hero, Jason, must exit his tank and enter into various caverns, temples, and other structured facilities that basically amount to dungeons: imagine *The Legend of Zelda* with laser guns and robots. What could possibly go wrong?

Blaster Master takes things up a notch or two even over *Zelda* when it comes to the boss fights at the end of each area. The bosses are huge, nicely animated, screen-filling monstrosities that range from the bizarre (Jason's giant, mutated pet frog) to the grotesque (a giant floating brain with flailing tentacles). Combat is visceral and unforgiving, and despite having ultra-smooth play control, the game is notoriously difficult. That said, it is one of the best-looking and best-sounding games on the NES. The tank, lovingly named Sophia III in reference to elements in the game's original story lost in translation, is wonderfully animated and detailed, and the huge environments are visually lush and rich. The overhead dungeon environments look nice, and the hero, Jason, is very well animated. The soundtrack is easily one of the best on the NES, with memorable melodies and excellent instrumentation alongside excellent sound effects.

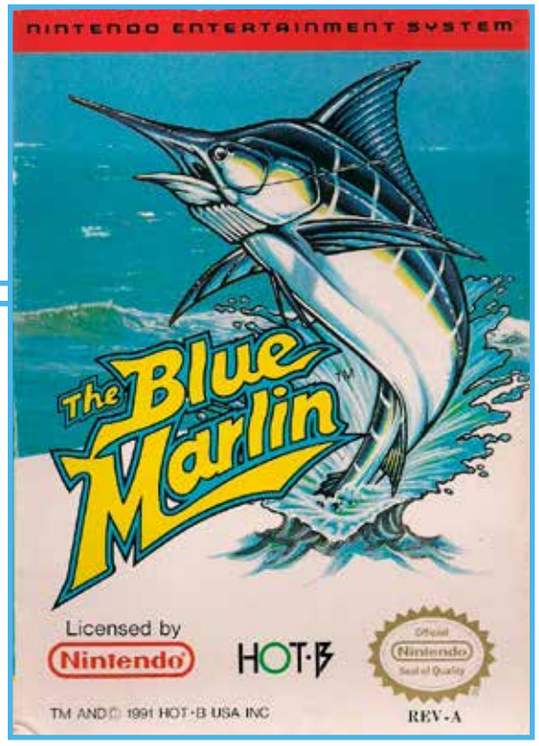
For all its technical glory and soul-crushing difficulty, *Blaster Master* has a sentimental value for me, both as a gamer and an artist. I played the game often as a kid, usually during sleepovers at friends' houses where we would play the game virtually all night long trying, and most assuredly failing, to beat it. *Blaster Master* was the undisputed "rental king" for me and my friends, and I don't think any of us ever actually beat it without a Game Genie. The game burned itself into my subconscious during those play sessions, becoming permanently ingrained in my mind.

I've had the amazing opportunity to be a game developer for nearly a decade and a half now, as a concept artist and user interface artist/designer, and there are still times when I find little influences clearly inspired by this game popping up in my work. The environments, creature designs, and especially Sophia III herself all told a wonderful visual narrative that always fired up my imagination and kept my creative wheels turning without really ever saying a word. I can probably speak similarly for a lot of these old video games, which is partly why I still love them all so much. *Blaster Master* just happens to have done a better job than most. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Blue Marlin

PUBLISHER: Hot-B
DEVELOPER: Mint
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



The sequel to *The Black Bass*, *The Blue Marlin* improves upon its predecessor with more-detailed graphics, a wider variety of fish (including marlin, sailfish, shark, tuna, swordfish, dorado, and barracuda), smarter fish, the ability for gamers to navigate a boat (as opposed to merely selecting a fishing spot to park the boat), and fisherman attributes like vitality and strength. The action begins off the coast of Florida and continues on to Hawaii, where the majority of the game takes place. The objective is to reel in the largest fish type per round of the tournament. As the game starts you have a top-down view of your boat as you cruise around to spot a fish

in the water and hook one to then activate the reel mode. When you are trying to reel in the big one, you should alternate between reeling in the fish and pulling up the rod, making sure to thumb the line from time to time to avoid tiring out. As you battle more and more fish in this addictive game you can increase muscle power, body strength, and skill. The increased production values are clearly evident in the visuals, most notably the textured water waves, the jumping fish, and the close-up angled side-view as you fish off the back of the boat. The angler action is impressive, mimicking the excitement and challenge of real deep sea fishing as well as the NES can.

Notable Quotable:

"While *Blue Marlin* isn't going to win any awards for being the most overwhelming game, it does manage to dish up enough of a good time to make it stand out from a crowd of me-too titles. Not for everyone, but *Blue Marlin*, like *Black Bass*, is addictive and fun." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"A fishing game in which you sit for long stretches in front of the television set, reel in the occasional fish, then sit again for long stretches in front of the television set. As if this weren't deadly enough, while you're perched in your video dinghy you're treated to an incessant, looped soundtrack of Japanese pseudo-jazz nonsense, the apotheosis of every tonal cliché in the history of video game music." —*Entertainment Weekly* (October 30, 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are without much animation or variety, but like most good games, *The Blue Marlin*'s strategy makes the graphics seem more secondary. The music is decent but too ever-present; game publishers need to learn that silence and quiet sound effects can sometimes be more effective accompaniment (especially in a game such as this one) than constant, repetitive jingles. It may all sound pretty mundane, and compared to blasting aliens I suppose it is. However, after an hour or so I was 'hooked' on *The Blue Marlin*. I liked the rhythm; you gently cruise for a while, leisurely trying different lures and depths. Then there's a tug on the line and the excitement picks up. I felt truly frustrated with myself when making incorrect decisions and just as satisfied for winning the tournament." —John Huxley (www.defunctgames.com)

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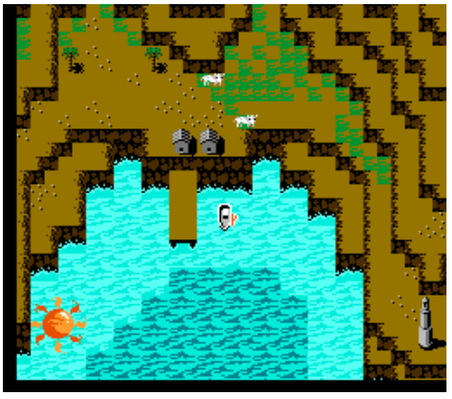


The Blues Brothers

PUBLISHER: Titus Software
DEVELOPER: Titus France
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992

THE BLUES BROTHERS
Cruise along with Jake and Elwood, those all-time rhythm 'n' blues men in this crazy platform game - an explosive mix of adventure, comedy and music.
They sent the police into a panic
They whipped the crowds into a frenzy
They redefined rock 'n' roll music
And now... they've ready to do it again
TITUS

The Blues Brothers is little more than a mundane platformer, besmirching the name of the raucous, adventurous, rousingly good comedy film (1980) on which it's based. Jake or Elwood (or both in two-player mode) must run, jump (over gaps and onto moving platforms), crawl, and climb (stairs and ladders) their way through five chapters: Stairway to Heaven, Wear-House, Jailhouse Rock, Underworld, and Demolition Experts. Enemies in the game include such nasties as snakes, blobs, sharks (swimming does come into play), spiders, evil cops, and mad dogs. The musically inclined (at least in the movie) heroes can kick eggs at enemies and ride a dog and a snake, and springs allow for heightened hops, but most of the action consists of simple avoidance, which quickly gets old. Endlessly looping versions of the "Peter Gunn Theme," "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love," and other tunes is the supposed "strength" of the game. Much different than the more adventurous Super Nintendo version, which you can read about in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

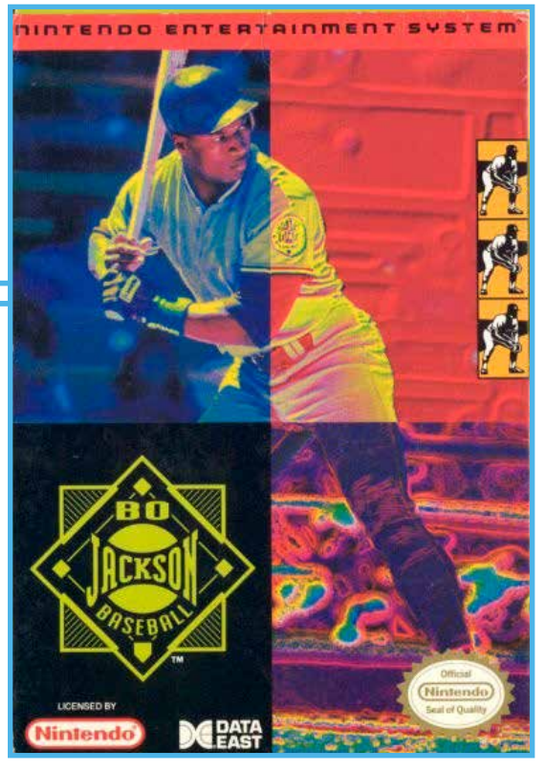
Notable Quotable:
"*Blues Brothers* is unappealing in almost every department. For platform junkies and movie buffs alike." —*Nintendo Magazine System* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"There isn't very much excitement in *The Blues Brothers*. Many games offer similar situations and playability. Even the music (some taken directly from the movie) doesn't live up to expectations . . .the narrative text is sloppy, with misspellings and slipshod syntax." —*Game Players* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Levels contain little story complexity and are, for the most part, unrelated to the movie . . . Jake and Elwood are haphazard to control at best. With only two continues this cart's way too difficult for most gamers, and there are too few items, secrets, character moves, and power-ups. *Blue's Brother*'s big plus is its music. You get toe-tapping 8-bit sounds, but there aren't a ton of tracks. The graphics are crisp and colorful." —*GamePro* (June 1992)

Bo Jackson Baseball

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



During the late '80s and early '90s Bo Jackson was a two-sport superstar, excelling at both professional baseball and football. Injuries shortened his career. He was a media darling as well and a marketing mogul, starring in a popular "Bo Knows" series of commercials for Nike. He also starred in video games, including *Bo Jackson Baseball*, which features his likeness as well as his name. The game features 26 non-licensed teams named after cities. The action begins with an instrumental rendition of the "National Anthem" ("sung" by a rather attractive lady). You can select a team, adjust its lineup, and challenge a friend or the computer. The game includes a four-team playoff tournament in a three-, five-, or seven-game format. Or you can simply play Exhibition mode. To bat, you time your swing as the ball crosses the plate. The type of swing depends on the icon you select from an onscreen menu: power, contact, bunt, or normal. Base stealing is also allowable. You can throw five types of pitches with three speeds. After the ball is hit into play the closest fielder will be highlighted, letting you run toward the ball or perform a jump or dive. Jackson himself is an unlockable player, and when there's a close play a close-up of a manager and umpire appear, arguing the call.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Just as multi-talented sports star Bo Jackson is missing the '91 pro baseball season, he also seems to be sitting out Data East's *Bo Jackson Baseball*, making only cameo appearances on the title screen and at the end of the game. Regardless of Bo's whereabouts, the game is a solid baseball exercise." — *Nintendo Power* (September 1991)

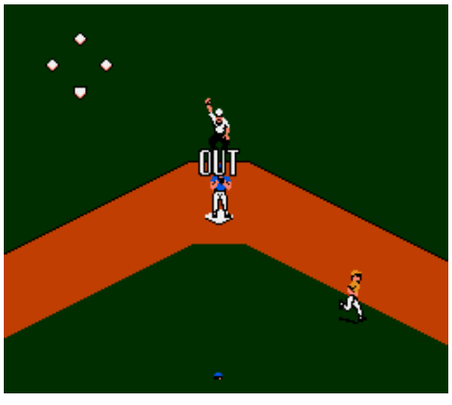
Notable Quotable:

"Nope! Bo don't know video games! If he did, *B.J. Baseball* would have been smoother, cleaner, and have more options than it does. The music isn't horrid, but it needs a little work. The graphics are better than an Atari 2600, but the buck stops here. This game will sell on name alone." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:

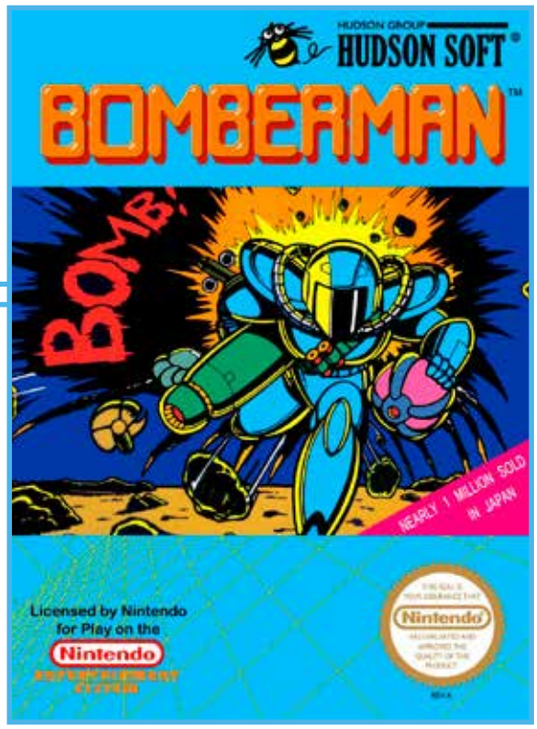
"In this clumsily executed baseball game the batter and pitcher appear to be about two feet apart, and on defense you can't even see the pitcher. Selecting pitches and swing types is done through a bulky menu, giving the game an almost turn-based feel, and hitting is nearly impossible. A very angry-sounding umpire calls balls and strikes, which gets annoying quickly." — Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Memories: I worked at Lone Star Comics during the Bo Jackson craze. The store carried sports cards, and even though I typically only collected non-sport and basketball cards, I amassed quite the Bo Jackson card collection because I thought he was just so danged cool.



Bomberman

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



A nice start to the popular, prolific franchise, *Bomberman* is a simplistic, though fun and addictive little game in which the player plants bombs, runs away from the resultant explosion, and then plants more bombs. The mazes consist of concrete panels and brick walls, the latter of which may reveal one of the following power-ups when destroyed: increased bomb blast radius, the ability to detonate bombs via remote control, or increased running speed. Prior to exiting each level Bomberman must walk around destroying a bunch of goofy little smiley-faced characters, avoiding their firepower in the process. Then the exit will be revealed under one of the 40 blocks. There's no two-player simultaneous mode and the action is a bit repetitive since each of the 50 levels look (and sound) the same, but the game's basic, highly influential gameplay elements remain a pleasure. *Bomberman* inspired lots of remakes and sequels that increased the entertainment value considerably with the inclusion of varying maze designs and, most importantly, multi-player action.

Memories: One of the biggest gaming mistakes of my life was getting rid of my boxed copy of *Super Bomberman* for the Super Nintendo, complete with multi-tap adaptor. It sold for a nice sum on eBay, but I miss having it. Playing the original *Bomberman* on the NES is fine, but I've spent more time playing the NES Classic Series port on my Game Boy Advance since it's a good, simple game to play on the go. My favorite game in the series is *Mega Bomberman* on the Sega Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"What most people forget is *Bomberman*'s more humble beginning on the NES. The original *Bomberman* is a fairly slow paced, single-player affair . . . It lacks a lot of the elements that made the *Bomberman* series classic." —Scott Bolderson (www.gaming-withswag.com

Notable Quotable:
"With only 50 rooms it is fairly easy to complete . . .since the basic arrangement (and color) of the concrete blocks is always the same it becomes a little monotonous . . .may be perfect for an inexperienced Game Boy player . . .since the brick designs are random, every time you play you get a slightly different game . . .may not be for advanced gamers, but that doesn't mean it isn't fun (and good practice) for beginners." —*Game Players* (June/July 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Although the rooms and monsters aren't all that much different, and the game has a sameness to it after a while, it offers the same addictive fun as *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug*, and similar maze-type games. Two complaints, albeit minor ones: the passwords are a real pain to input, and because of the random way the mazes and monsters are generated a later stage will occasionally begin with you hemmed into a tiny area . . .and a monster right beside you. You die even before you can set a bomb!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

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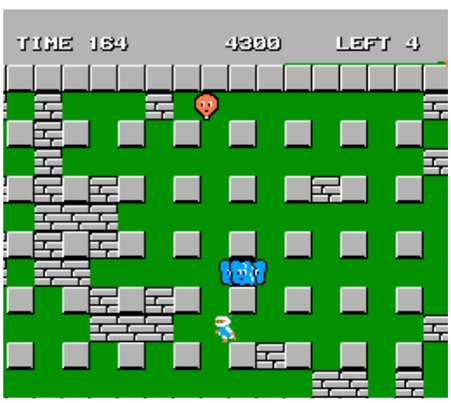

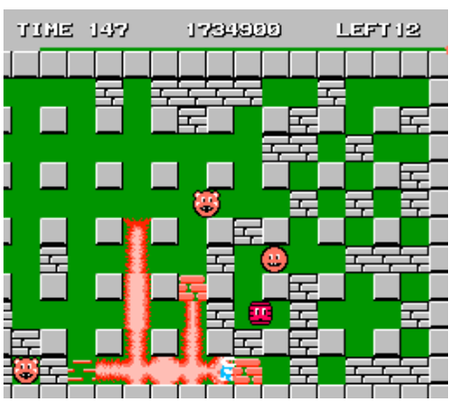

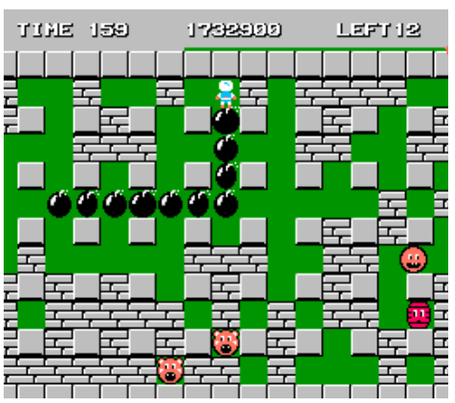

Bomberman II

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1–3 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993

Bomberman returns for more explosive destruction in this polished sequel. Players guide their character around more than 50 different clearly rendered, top-down mazes, each delineated by concrete panels, brick walls, or other small squares. The objective is to set bombs to blow up pursuing figures and the brick walls while avoiding explosions. Destroying a brick wall may reveal the exit to the next level or uncover a power-up item, such as a remote-control detonator, Bomberman symbol (hidden bonus round), flame face (bomb blast extender), wall pass (walk through walls), skate (walk faster), or vest (fireproof against your own blast). These power-ups are useful in doling out damage, but some increase the risk of the player blowing themselves up by accident. Dating to 1983 in Japan, the original *Bomberman* was released for the NES in 1989, giving gamers a fun but limited and somewhat tedious experience for one player. This sequel ups the enjoyment ante considerably with multiplayer battle action (VS Mode and Battle Mode), a feature that would characterize and become a staple of the long-running franchise. One of the best party games for the NES, this addictive cart, with its improved graphics and sounds compared to the original, is highly recommended. A multi-tap adaptor is required for three-player action.

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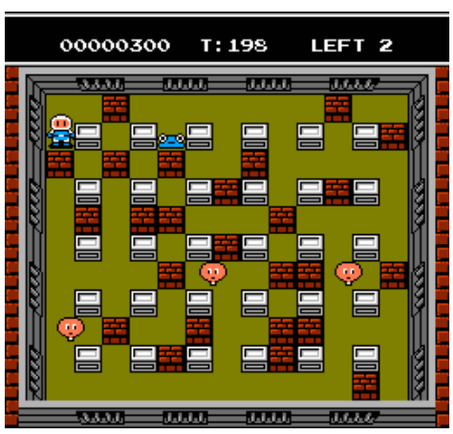
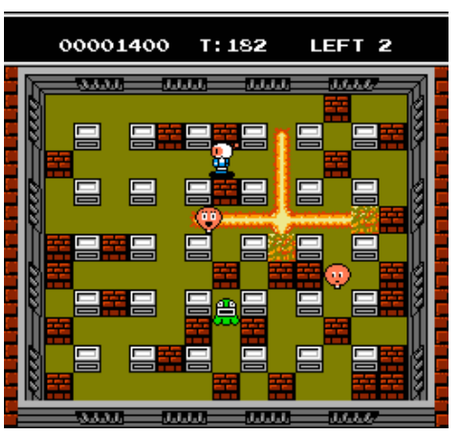
Notable Quotable:

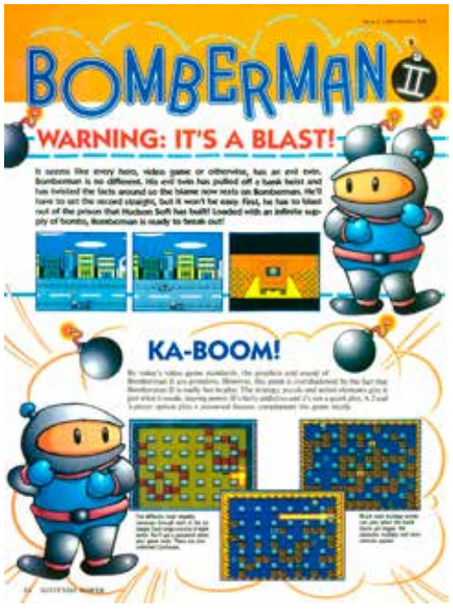
"Just like the original . . . In fact, it may be a little *too* similar in some ways . . .playing against human opponents is far more interesting and challenging than playing against the rather dumb and predictable computer enemies . . . The graphics are blah, but they're clear, crisp, and basically as good as the T-16 version—with very little flickering, but with some slowdown on the higher levels . . . The sound effects and music are good enough so you won't leap up to turn off the sound, but they're pretty generic and simple." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (March 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Bomberman II* is the rare sequel that is better than its predecessor . . . The one-player mode is fun, but the multi-player mode is where the real fun is at . . .will bring out some serious competition at a party and is so easy that it is still completely playable after a couple drinks. The graphics are a major step up from the original *Bomberman*. There is also a substantial number of new and difficult enemies to face . . . I also like the cutscenes that appear every once in a while in an attempt to tell a story . . . The controls are perfect . . . The quest mode is long but easy." —NES Archive (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)







Bonk's Adventure

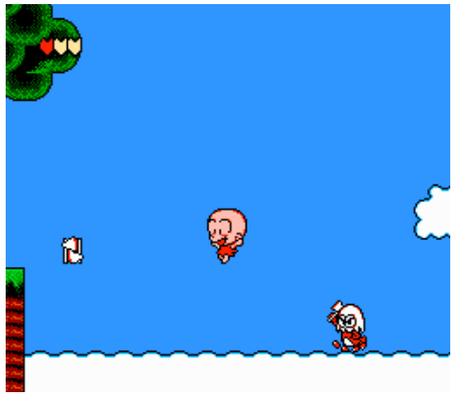
PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: A.I. Company Ltd
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1994

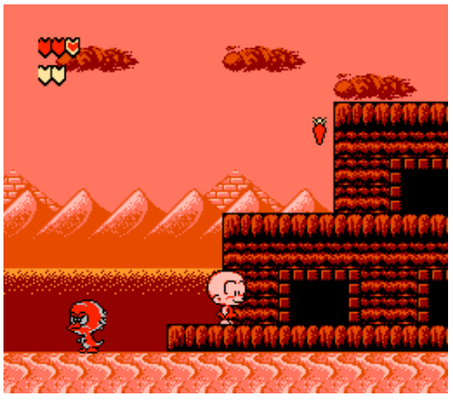
Dinosaur Land is under attack. Evil King Drool has captured the Moon Princess and wants to take over the entire land. It's up to you as a little cave boy with a mighty noggin to beat the big bad and rescue the princess. Though sporting fewer levels and fewer colors than its more-popular, better-sounding TurboGrafx-16 progenitor (which gave that console a mascot), *Bonk's Adventure* for the NES nevertheless retains a high degree of playability and cartoonish humor. Gamers guide the big-headed cave boy as he runs, jumps, swims, and climbs (using a special wall-biting technique) his way through perilous Dinosaur Land (including inside a dinosaur itself), collecting smiling faces and searching for the aforementioned beauty. To battle the many beasties he will come across, including huge bosses, Bonk does a midair spin and "bonks" them with his huge, indestructible head. Power-ups are obtained by bonking Bani Bani flowers, which provide higher jumps, extra energy, and pieces of meat, giving Bonk the ability to simply run over enemies. Flowers can also transport Bonk to special bonus zones that test the cave boy's jumping, spinning, climbing, and swimming skills.

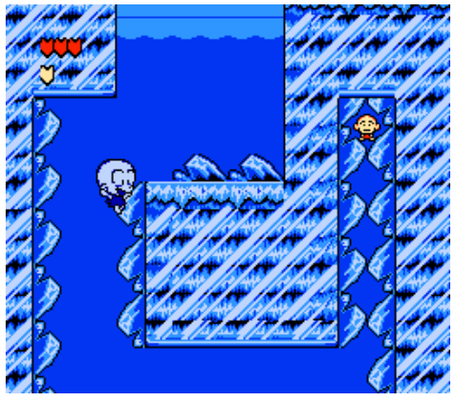
Memories: *Bonk's Adventure* is such a trademark mascot game for the TurboGrafx-16 that it seems odd it made its way to the NES. Imagine *Sonic the Hedgehog* on the NES and that's what this feels like to me, a longtime Turbo fan. Unfortunately, the game was produced late in the life cycle of the NES, meaning relatively few copies were produced. In fact, I never saw it for sale or for rent in stores back in the day. *Super Bonk* for the Super Nintendo is much easier to find.

Notable Quotable:
"A terrific translation of the original TurboGrafx-16 version. You've still got your mid-air spins, wall bites, and, of course, plenty of Bani Bani flowers and bonus levels." —*Gameplayers* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Includes fewer levels (and some were shuffled around), fewer items (especially fruits) and enemies, smaller sprites, and stiffer controls. Some of the bosses have also been simplified . . . It looks surprisingly good and very well put together. The game has obviously taken a hit—graphics are less colorful, sprites are smaller, some levels have been cut, and there's less enemies on the screen at once . . .not as fluid and responsive as the original game . . .overall really easy, except for the massive last stage that will repeatedly crush you . . .this port is more than correct and managed to keep the spirit and fun factor." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)







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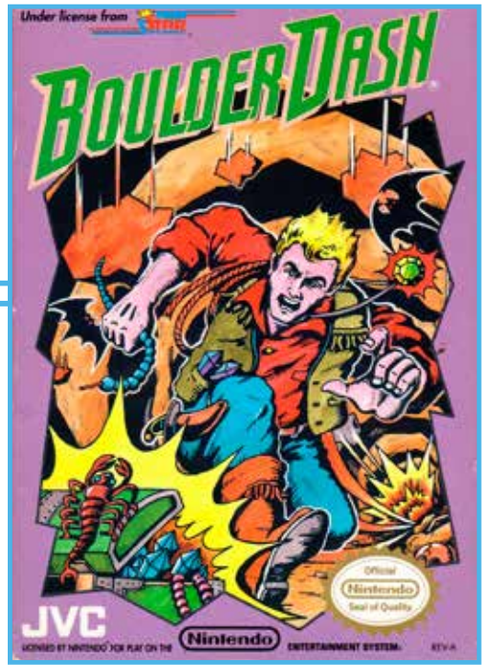
Boulder Dash

PUBLISHER: JVC
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1990



If you like *Dig Dug* and *Mr. Do!* but would like to play something a little more difficult and complex check out *Boulder Dash*, which tasks you with finding the Secret Jewels of the Sixth World. First released in 1984 as a computer, arcade, and ColecoVision game, *Boulder Dash* was updated in 1990 for the arcades and the NES. Players control Rockford as he tunnels underground, digging maze tunnels, dodging enemies and falling objects, and collecting the required number of diamonds within a set time limit to make exit doors appear. Unlike *Dig Dug* and *Mr. Do!*, the screen scrolls to show the large playfield. Dropping a rock on an enemy (by tunneling under the rock) makes it explode, breaking objects and obstacles around it. Enemies will also release diamonds when hit, but some diamonds are out in the open for you to easily find and collect. Rocks can also be used to block objects, such as amoebas, which turn into diamonds when surrounded. Highly recommended.

Notable Quotable:

"*Boulder Dash* has an addictive quality found in games like *Solomon's Key*. Good gameplay and cute graphics highlight this cart." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Sound effects are top-notch . . .tough to complete . . . In some of the levels the boulders and enemies are so dangerously arranged that it becomes almost impossible to defeat the level unless you can figure out the one method that will get you through . . . For a strategy game *Boulder Dash* is pretty entertaining . . .definitely one of the most overlooked and underrated games of its time . . .very well designed." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

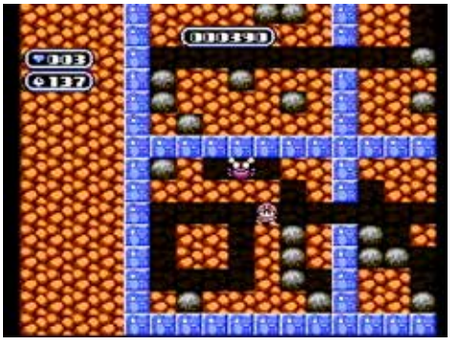
Notable Quotable:

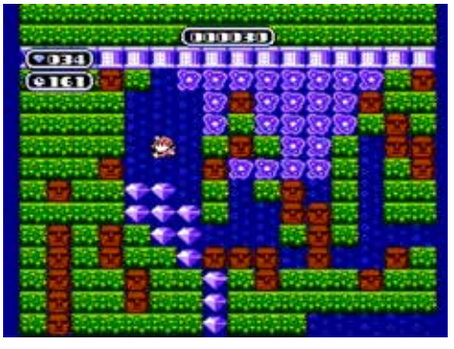
"It might be over six years old, but *Boulder Dash* is still as fresh as ever. Data East has improved the graphics and added a neat front end, but have retained the same maps and gameplay that made the C64 version one of the classic games of all time. It's massively addictive, calling on arcade skills and fiendish puzzle-solving in a way that draws you totally into the game. You shout with frustration as a wrong move results in Rockford being buried under a pile of boulders, then yell victoriously when you work out how to get those last few diamonds and finish the screen! *Boulder Dash* is one of the greatest games ever written." —*Mean Machines* (August 1991)

Insider Insight: *Boulder Dash* and its sequel, *Super Boulder Dash*, were two of my absolute favorite childhood PC games. Filled with numerous levels of exploring caves, dodging rocks, and avoiding fireflies and other enemies, all in the name of grabbing enough diamonds and finding the cave exit before time runs out, these games provided endless hours of entertainment and challenge, both solo and with friends.

So imagine my excitement when I learned that the first of these classics was being ported to the NES—surely this had to be great. But the anticipation quickly morphed into letdown, as I initially surmised that the game just barely window dressed the original, featuring the same cave layouts with only slightly improved graphics and sound (albeit adding a world map and password system). I bought the game, played it, assessed it as not worth the sticker price, and effectively gave up on it.

What I utterly missed in my haste, though, is that the NES version features substantially more levels than the PC original—96 as opposed to just 16. Unfortunately, I bailed on the game way too soon to recognize this, but the additional caves actually elevate NES *Boulder Dash* to far more than simply mirroring the original. For nostalgic reasons the PC version nevertheless remains my favorite. But for a significantly more comprehensive, immersive *Boulder Dash* experience, the NES port is surely the way to go. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*





OSCILLATEER PUBLISHING

A Boy and His Blob: Trouble on Blobolonia

PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Developed by David "Pitfall!" Crane, *A Boy and His Blob* shares some things in common with *Pitfall!* (including a side-view perspective and caverns to navigate), but it features a highly original component: that of an alien blob following players as they run around collecting treasure, climbing stairs, shooting vitamins at enemies (including subway serpents, popcorn, and magic marshmallows), and dodging falling rocks, stalactites, chocolate kisses, and other obstacles. The Blob is the key to success, since feeding him jelly beans turns him into various helpful shapes, such as a ladder, a bridge, a rocket, a hole, or a blow torch. There are 14 jelly bean flavors, each with a different effect on the Blob. The action can get tedious, but it's nice that the game requires players to think their way through each area.

Notable Quotable:

"It's certainly a great title, and it's almost a great game . . . Sadly, though, the puzzles aren't as inventive as you'd hope [and] there's no way to save your game." —*The Video Games Guide* (Second Edition, McFarland Publishers, 2013)

Notable Quotable:

"There's a lot to like about *A Boy and His Blob*, with some cool digitized graphics and animations bringing the story to life. The transforming Blob introduces some interesting opportunities, but the lack of scrolling screens and other rough edges do detract from the overall appeal . . . It's a silly concept and looks like Crane's 2600 titles but it still plays well." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* #8 (March 1990)

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TOSS ONE AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.
A Blob...
A Ladder...
An Umbrella...
A Submersible Bubble...
A Trampoline...
A Vitablaster...
Blob has come from the distant planet Blobolonia™ in search of an earth boy to help him save his world.
Discover his amazing appetite for jellybeans, and watch as he changes shape with every flavor.
Learn to use this special power to overcome even the most outrageous obstacles.
Join the Blob on his famous adventure filled with constant surprises and humorous characters.
A BOY AND HIS BLOB™ Now for the NES.
Licensed by Nintendo for play on the Nintendo
DAVID CRANE'S A BOY AND HIS BLOB
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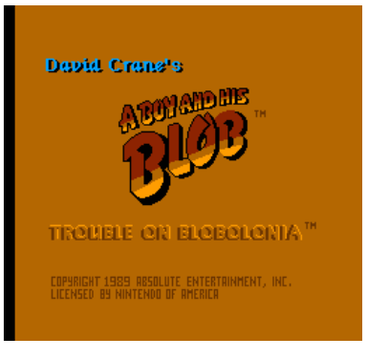
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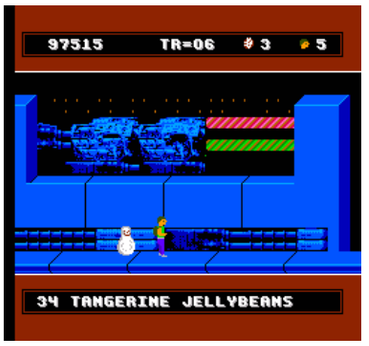

Bram Stoker's Dracula

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft
DEVELOPER: Probe Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

Loosely based on Francis Ford Coppola's opulent 1992 film, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* has gamers guiding Jonathan Harker through Castle Dracula, Hillingham Estate Mansion, Carfax Abbey Crypt, and other creepy locales on a mission to rescue Mina Murray from the Prince of Darkness. You'll battle such enemies as skeletons, ghosts, [illegible]men, zombies, and Dracula himself, in his shadow, bat, and wolf beast forms. There are also obstacles to get past such as spike pits, nail beds, collapsing platforms, and fire-water channels. Harker begins the game with a hacking/slashing weapon, but can pick up rocks, triple rocks, axes (which spin when thrown), and enemy-burning torches. He can also crouch, look up and down, do long jumps and standing jumps, and perform a jumping smash maneuver to fall through ledges. To grab weapons and other pickups such as 1ups, continues, energy, invincibility, and extra time Harker smashes open *Super Mario*-style boxes. Having more in common with the *Castlevania* series than the thematically/literarily similar NES games like *Frankenstein* or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the game features solid creature-battling action, tricky bosses, a smooth learning curve, and precise control. Each boss and mini-boss must be beaten in a different manner, and creatures pop up out of nowhere, making for a nice challenge. The game has decent graphics and ambitious (if annoying) music.

Notable Quotable:

"If you're looking for another *Castlevania*, you're looking the completely wrong way . . . This game is one sad excuse for a platformer. In fact, I don't even think the game knows what it is supposed to be. One second it wants to be an adventure game, the next it wants to be some lame attempt at a puzzle game. All with a time limit, of course. What bad game isn't complete without a time limit?" – Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The levels tend to be somewhat mazelike. There are occasionally branching paths and dead ends, but mostly there are hidden rooms and caches of items tucked away in certain places . . . There are skulls installed in the walls that shoot fireballs . . .hands that grab out at you from the background . . .retracting spikes in the walls . . .enough variety here to make the game interesting to play . . .the amount of allotted time tends to be fairly tight late in the game so there is a balance between exploring the stages for items and moving forward to reach the end." —Take on the NES Library (takeontheneslibrary.com)

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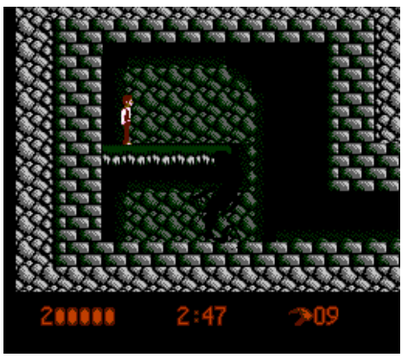
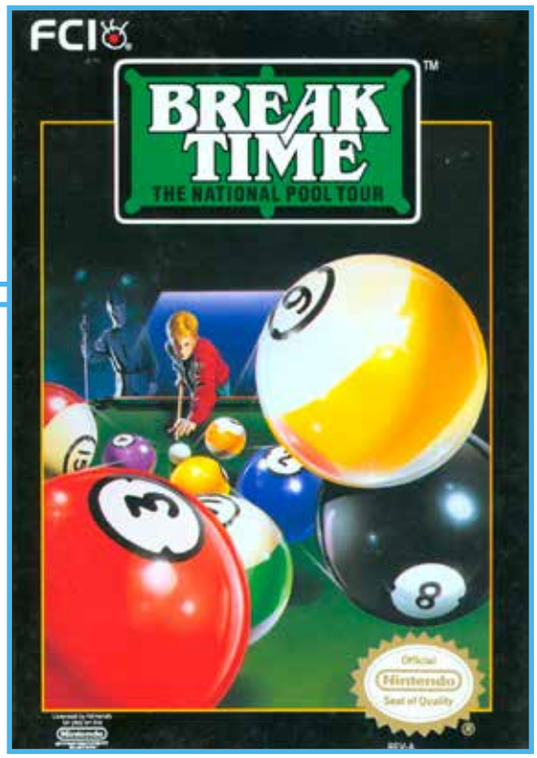
Insider Insight: This was a case of unintentional game mastery. There was only one television at my friend's house and her older brother got home before us. Long before YouTube we would sit and watch him play through games, and our abrasive comments were instant. "You suck. Why didn't you jump?" Literal thumbs down. If we annoyed him enough he would leave, and we could put in whatever VHS B-movie we had rented. One day, after he had a particularly difficult time avoiding the impressively creepy spiders in Scene 4, he tired of us imitating the anxiety-inducing music and left. We discovered the VCR was jammed and decided to give *Bram Stoker's Dracula* a try. We were each able to fly through the first half of the game thanks to our armchair expertise. Her brother was pissed when he found out we beat the game before him. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*



Break Time: The National Pool Tour

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Opera House
GAME TYPE: Sports/Billiards, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993



In *Break Time: The National Pool Tour*, you maneuver a cursor around the billiards table to line up your shot. Then, using a moving cue and a meter, you select the power of the shot. The table is viewed from overhead while the moving cue and meter appear in windows along the bottom third of the screen (the table takes up the top part of the screen). There are four opponents of varying difficulty and six modes of play: Nine Ball, Rotation, Eight Ball, 14–1 Rack Game, Practice, and The National Pool Tour, where you'll test your skills against five different fictional pool pros (such as Ernie English of Milwaukee and Suzie Cue of New York) in five different cities on your quest to become the champion. Watch mode lets you kick back and simply check out the pros in action. Digitized voice effects and overbearing music accompany the gameplay.

Notable Quotable:

"*Break Time*'s CPU is a vicious pool shark . . . Even the beginner CPU player has no problem blasting a three-cushion combo. Using the cue stick is a breeze with the compact overhead view of the table . . . The pool action is sweet, and the graphics and animations capture real-world table dynamics, with great action off the cushions." —*GamePro* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The most ambitious pool simulation ever produced for an 8-bit video game system . . . The graphics are *Break Time*'s major weakness. The balls do not have the rich color, much less the highlights, one would expect from an NES game at this point in time . . . *Side Pocket* offers much more realistic ball movement—as well as superior sound effects . . . *Break Time* does offer one major advantage over *Side Pocket*, however, and that is its computer-controlled competitors . . .a more realistic pool simulation without any of *Side Pocket*'s more overt arcade elements." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1993)

Insider Insight: The same uncle who introduced me to Nintendo also hoped I would become a pool shark. He tried to explain the mathematic principles of pool, the physics behind winning. I was eight. I was not the prodigy he hoped for, mostly because I was barely tall enough to see over the table. *Break Time* gave me the opportunity I needed to practice. I could play around with different angles and force, and get more experience with the mechanics and logic involved. It was also a surprisingly relaxing game. As with solitaire or minesweeper, while there was still a desire to win, there wasn't the heightened anxiety that usually accompanied my Nintendo-playing. It was calculated and calm. I still suck at pool, but I gained an appreciation for it through *Break Time*. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*

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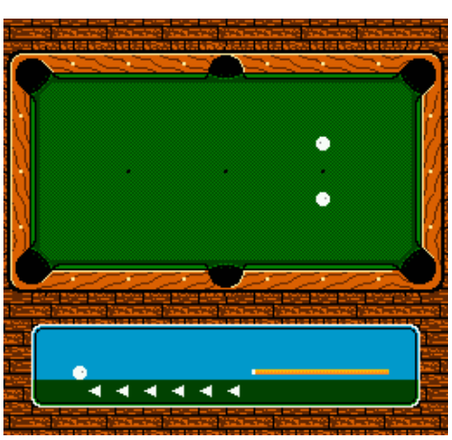
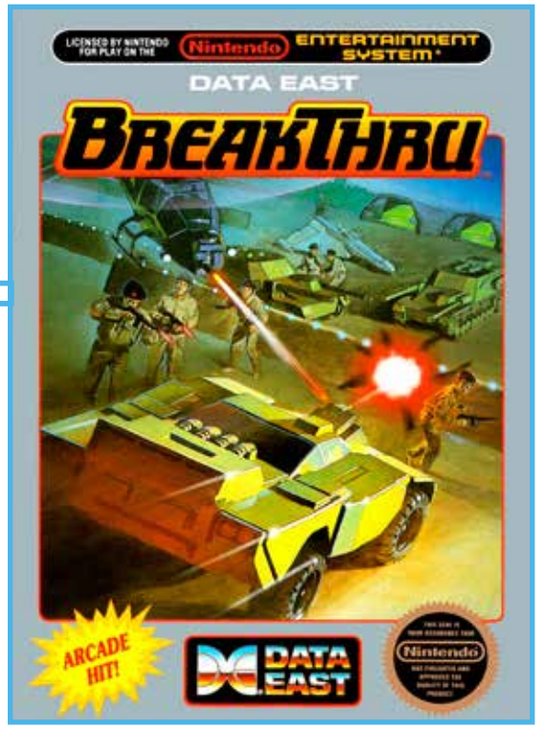


BreakThru

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Data East
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987



Not to be confused with *BreakThru!* for the Super NES, which is a *Tetris*-inspired puzzler, *BreakThru* for the NES is a solid port of Data East's 1986 arcade shooter. Terrorists have stolen the PK430 jet fighter, the nation's top secret military weapon. To retrieve it, you must drive your super jeep through five enemy territories, including mountains, prairies, cities, and airfields. You'll drive your assault vehicle from left to right, speeding up and slowing down (the rate of speed determines the distance of the jump) to avoid or jump over land mines, rocks, missiles, destroyed bridges, and other obstacles. There are also enemies to shoot, including infantrymen, armored buggies, armored cars, jeeps, fire mobiles, trucks, tanks, and helicopters. Grabbing power barrels that come down from the sky gives you three-way fire and extra lives. The game moves fast, and precision jumping is a must, but unlimited continues make the game beatable. *Moon Patrol* fans may enjoy *BreakThru*.

Notable Quotable:

"This game is fun, though not for the seasoned player. It becomes tedious in places once you've learned the layout and the location of the enemy. A timer would have made it more exciting, forcing you to go as quickly as possible . . . The jets in the hangars at the Airfield are knockouts; the landslide and bridge graphics are also very impressive. When you win, the takeoff of the PK430 is fun to watch." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

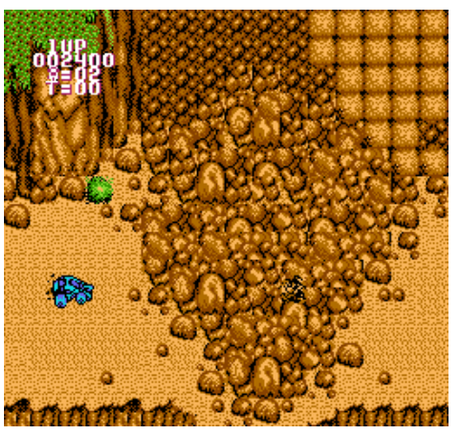
Notable Quotable:

"The game does handle well and when I died, I never felt it was due to sloppy controls . . . Graphically this game gets the job done, but it's far from the best I've seen on the NES. The stage backgrounds look alright and fit the theme of each stage. The player sprite looks good while most of the enemy sprites look so-so. The audio in the game is basic . . .a very short game once you know what to avoid . . .difficulty stems from learning where to jump and when to dodge . . . While *BreakThru* is far from a great game, it does keep things simple and playable. However, after a single playthrough there really isn't much reason to come back." —The Gamer's Library (www.thegamerslibrary.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Your basic weapon isn't great, firing single bullets straight ahead of you . . .points aren't much of an incentive, so I had no problem jumping over everything that came at me . . .the visuals and music, while passable, are nothing to write home about. The controls are pretty solid . . .it was alright . . .nice to play something a little different." —Cannot be Tamed (YouTube)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Bubble Bath Babes

PUBLISHER: Panesian
DEVELOPER: Computer & Entertainment
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991

Want to see pixelated boobies on your television screen? Try *Bubble Bath Babes*, which is easily the best of the three adult NES games produced by Panesian (*Peek-A-Boo Poker* and *Hot Slots* are the others). It is a challenging puzzler in which groupings of four bubbles rise from the bottom of the playfield into formations up above, and you can arrange them and move them into place. When four or more bubbles of the same color touch they will burst, clearing them from the screen, which is what you want. Spelling out MAGIC (letters appear in certain bubbles) is a helpful strategy, and randomly appearing transforming bubbles turn surrounding bubbles into the same color. Level progression treats players to pictures of seductively dressed (or undressed) women and a two-player split-screen mode provides some nice competition. Unlicensed and very hard to find. AVE released a sanitized non-nude version of the game called *Mermaids of Atlantis*.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Even without the 'adult' factor, this would still be a very fun, addictive game. As an added bonus, once you beat all six levels on all four stages, then after entering your top score, you get rewarded with a parade of all 12 poses in succession, along with that catchy intermission music that by then you've probably come to love." —The Vault (vimm.net)

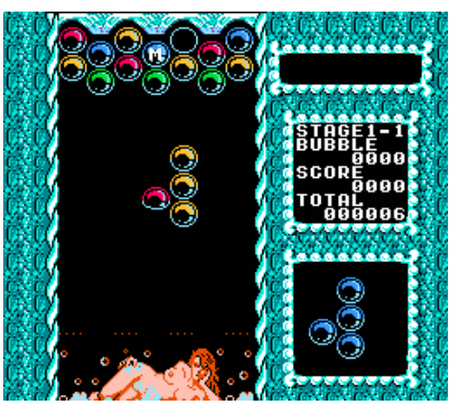
Notable Quotable:

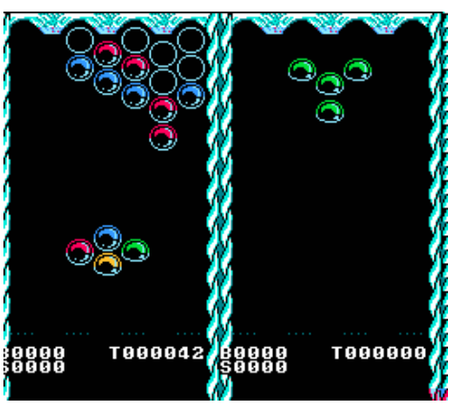
"Music isn't too bad . . .graphics aren't bad either . . .reminds me of a hybrid between *Tetris* and *Puzzle Bobble* . . .gets very hard . . . I love puzzle games and this is a really fun one . . . If you find a copy of this game consider yourself very lucky . . .strong replay value." —Gamester81 (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"*Bubble Bath Babes* is most notable for being one of three NES games to feature nudity, but its bubble-matching gameplay is good enough to keep it from being just a novelty. Unfortunately, the mild adult content overwhelms the aura of the game, even though it is a small part of the overall package. The topless woman at the bottom of the screen is tastefully depicted, but her inclusion is ultimately gratuitous since she has no effect on the action." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

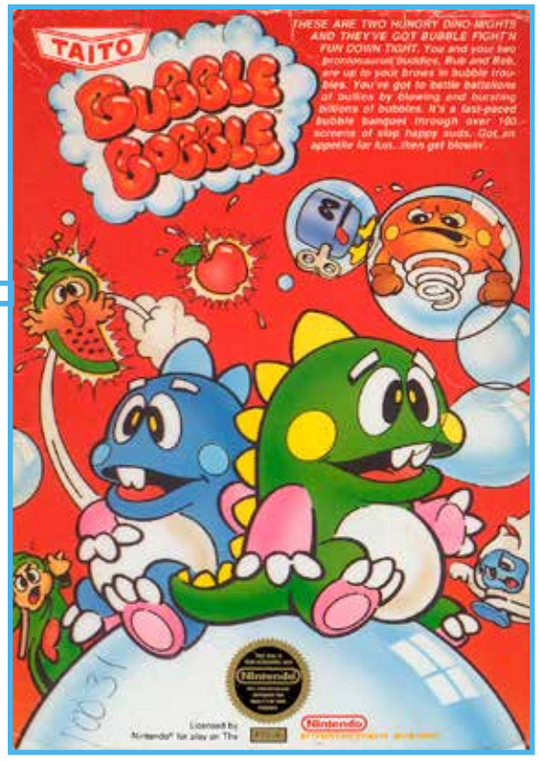
Insider Insight: We were definitely not supposed to play this game. We weren't even supposed to know it existed. If you tell our moms, we may still get in trouble. My friend's older brother told us we could use his Nintendo and any games we wanted. We pulled a big plastic bin out from under his bed and started digging through the poorly maintained cartridges. Toward the bottom we found what appeared to be an unopened *Tetris*. "Do you think he'll be mad if we open it?" "Nah. He probably doesn't even know it's in here." He knew. He knew the only original packaging in that bin was intentionally concealing *Bubble Bath Babes*. The initial shock and awe of the pixelated nudity was replaced relatively quickly with our boredom. "It's not like you even get to see more as you clear more bubbles. Lame." —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*





Bubble Bobble

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Taito
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



A stellar rendition of Taito's oft-ported 1986 arcade game, *Bubble Bobble* for the NES has players guiding a pair of running, jumping dinosaurs (who look like cartoon versions) named Bub and Bob around a series of non-scrolling, platform-heavy levels, blowing bubbles to trap beasties with such names as Willy Whistle, Baron Von Blubba, and Grumple Grommit. To remove the beasties from the playfield, which is the objective in each screen, players should burst the bubbles trapping the beasties. Bursting several enemy-holding bubbles in succession grants extra points. Grabbing candy, crosses, parasols, shoes, bombs, and other items gives players extra abilities, such as speed, faster and farther bubbles, weaponry (bombs, fire, thunder bubbles, earthquakes, lightning, water), and temporary invincibility. Players can also ride bubbles. There are two worlds, each containing 113 screens. A great game and a must-own for the console.

Notable Quotable:

"The sad thing about this version is that while it follows the layout of the original almost exactly, it just isn't fast enough to be playable in sufficient amounts for hardcore fans. However, once you get used to it, it's not that bad, and novices won't even notice the difference." —*Raze* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Cute theme song: it moves the pace of the game along. Music is also effectively used to warn of Baron von Blubba's approach. *Bubble Bobble* has only a few sound effects but they work well. The graphics don't have a lot of flash but are satisfactory. Characters show flicker, especially when moving at high speed or when many are onscreen at the same time . . .easily one of the cutest games for the NES. The tail-wagging dinosaur buddies are adorable . . .bubble riding is hard to master and takes practice." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"What a weird and wonderful piece of software! It might look all cute and cuddly, but don't be misled—this is one tough game. There are 100 screens to clear, and things start getting hard by level 20! Fortunately, there's a password system to let you go back to later levels—but the real challenge (and the way to get big scores) is to go through all the screens in one go! The inclusion of the coin-op's simultaneous two-player option is a real boon, and adds to the overall appeal. With great graphics (although they get a bit flickery when there are loads of bubbles floating around) and one of the catchiest soundtracks I've heard, *Bubble Bobble* is a thoroughly addictive and enjoyable game." —*Mean Machines* (November 1990)

Insider Insight: If you've ever played *Bubble Bobble* you probably have the music stuck in your head right now, just looking at the images on this page. Even though this was a "kiddy game," with its cutesy imagery and happy, happy music, it was still a challenge, and I really enjoyed playing it. I remember finally reaching the end of the game at my friend Mike's house and getting mad when the game told us that we had to beat it with two players to get the good ending. So of course we took the time to beat it together, because we didn't want to spend all day getting that far without getting the good ending. Thinking about it still raises my blood pressure, but at least I have the catchy music from the game to play in my head until the end of time to calm me down. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

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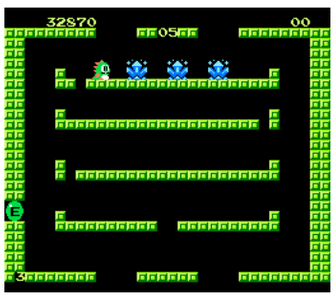
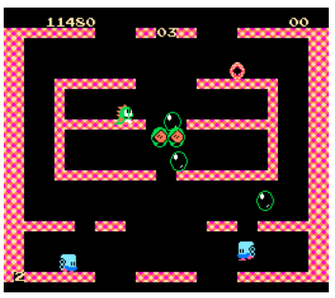
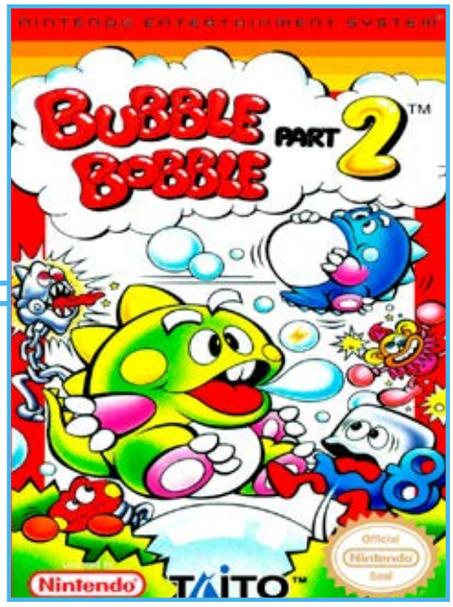




Bubble Bobble Part 2

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Taito
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1993



BUBBLE BOBBLE PART 2
A NEW BREED OF HEROES!
Cubby and Rubby, descendants of the famous Bubby, must battle the Skull Brothers and their army of fiends to rescue a friend in danger. Fortunately, our dinosaur heroes can blow bubbles that will destroy their foes. They will rain fire, floods and tornado.
TAITO

A much different game than the vertically scrolling *Rainbow Islands*, which was the arcade sequel to *Bubble Bobble*, *Bubble Bobble Part 2* for the NES plays a lot like *Bubble Bobble* (hop around as a cutesy dinosaur on platforms, emitting bubbles to trap enemies), but adds the following features: boss battles; background graphics (clouds, trees, and the like); clocks (to freeze enemies); pencils (to continue the game); bottles of wind (to create wind bubbles); and bonus basketball and volleyball mini-games. In addition, the dinosaurs can now float (by inflating), jump extra high (while on top of a bubble), and blow super bubbles (which can entrap several enemies at once). Enemies include such quirky critters as Hoppit, Slider, Flarion (a fire creature), Needler (who fires a sharp hat), Snagger (who shoots out his neck like a cobra), and Springit (who has a spring on his head). Released late in the life of the console, *Bubble Bobble Part 2* was an under-produced title, making it hard to find in today's collector's market, but the search and expense are well worth it as this is an excellent game. One drawback is that unlike the original *Bubble Bobble*, you can't play co-op with another gamer—you must take turns.

Notable Quotable:
"One of my favorite games on the NES . . .a masterpiece." —RetroGamerVlog (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"It's sad that the NES has been so quickly ditched by most publishers, though it's still a viable and inexpensive choice for many video game enthusiasts. *Bubble Bobble Part 2* extends the life of the system and gives something new for the players to look forward to." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Will feel very familiar if you have played the first title . . . Graphics are much better than the first *Bubble Bobble*, but the extra graphics put a strain on the NES, resulting in lower frame rates and jittery gameplay. The scenery changes as you play along so it's definitely a step above the original game that had blocky stages with a monotone background." —Epic Power Gaming (www.epicpowergaming.com)

Notable Quotable:
"By today's standards it seems somewhat dated . . . If you even get touched by an enemy you lose a life, which is unfortunate, since the dinosaurs are pretty limited to awkward jumping and walking movements that you can't control with any precision at all . . .colors are crisp and vibrant . . .the tiny little sprites and two-dimensional, one-screen stages look pretty dated. The backgrounds are nonexistent, and the enemies seem dull in comparison to current NES standouts like *Kirby's Adventure* . . .sounds are repetitive, but not annoying enough to really notice . . .strictly average fare." —*Game Pro* (December 1993)

Insider Insight: As a FuncoLand employee I was well-versed in the monthly newspaper price lists. I was also a huge fan of the original *Bubble Bobble*, so learning that there was a sequel was very exciting. The game was uncommon, but I remained vigilant. Then one day a copy of *Rainbow Islands* was traded in at my store, and I was quickly confused. Upon further inspection, I noticed the game's full title was *Rainbow Islands: The Story of Bubble Bobble 2*. Was the listing for *Bubble Bobble Part 2* an error? Did I never see the game because it didn't actually exist? No, because about a month later an actual copy of *Bubble Bobble Part 2* for NES walked into my store. I booted it up, and sure enough, it was a completely different game. So there are two different *Bubble Bobble* 2s? Cool. Later, the Game Boy version of *Bubble Bobble Part 2* was traded in, and wouldn't you know, that was yet another completely different game! The moral of the story is *Bubble Bobble* continuity is weird. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Bucky O'Hare

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

Based on *Bucky O'Hare and the Toad Wars*—the animated series from 1991—*Bucky O'Hare* for the NES lets players guide the titular comic book hero through eight challenging levels (four color coded planets and inside a Magma Tanker), rescuing his friends (AEC Blink, Deadeye Duck, Jenny, Willy DuWitt) and battling members of the Toad Empire, including Storm Toad Jet Trooper, Crater Centipede, and Robosnake. Once rescued, a friend becomes a playable character. Each friend has a different weapon and/or ability, such as a three-way pulse gun, bombs (for destroying walls and ice), flying, or clinging to walls. Gameplay evokes the more well-known *Mega Man*, but *Bucky O'Hare* offers more variety. Excellent platforming and shooting action, gorgeous visuals (including layered scrolling and colorful animation), and robust sound effects and music cement the deal. Konami released an arcade version the same year, but it's a beat-'em-up. A great game if you can get your hands on it.

Notable Quotable:

"A decent enough platformer which suffers from being over predictable and a wee bit easy." —*Nintendo Magazine System* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Layered scrolling, detailed sprites, and colorful animations . . .stands as an example of what the 8-bit console was capable of . . .incredible game . . .a classic, must-own platformer that still stands strong today." —*Video Game Collector* #7 (Winter 2007)

Notable Quotable:

"Bucky's graphics are Konami clean. The characters look cool, and there are some nice otherworldly backgrounds on the planets . . . On the surface this game looks like lighthearted fare aimed squarely at younger kids, but it's brimming with hotspots, such as the giant mechanical snake maze on the Blue Planet and the flowing lava on the Red Planet that will challenge even the best player . . .finger-flexing fun. Even if you don't like the comic book, the cartoon, and the action figures, you'll like the game." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

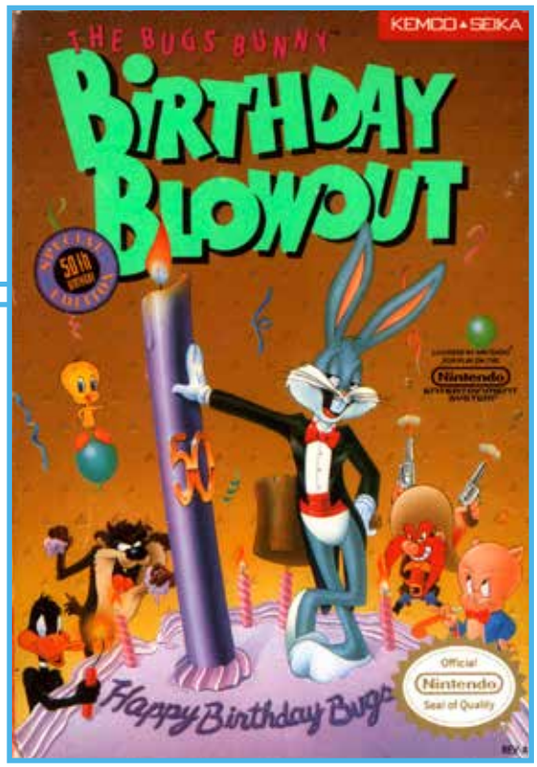
Insider Insight: *Bucky O'Hare* was one of the coolest toy lines and cartoon series of its time. When the NES game came out I was excited, and the game lived up to its license, as this is one of the greatest games for the system. Do you want a solid platformer that features several levels with amazing mechanics? Look no farther than *Bucky O'Hare*. You can control four different characters, each with a unique ability that helps you traverse each level (once you complete their respective level, of course). The first time I played *Bucky O'Hare* I was particularly impressed with the soundtrack! Talk about classic Konami goodness here on full display! I rented the heck out of this game back in the day. It has since gone way up in value, but it's well worth the gaudy price.—"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

Insider Insight: I grew up in the great anthropomorphic boom of the late '80s and early '90s, due in large part to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles craze that I was very much a part of. One short-lived distraction from the Heroes in a Half-Shell for me was Bucky O'Hare, which, like the Turtles, started life as a comic before getting turned into an animated series with an infectious theme song and action figure line (one I proudly owned all the figures and vehicles for, I might add). The show was about the titular character, a green-furred rabbit space captain who along with his animal crew mates fought an armada of toads. Konami—the company who made TMNT one of their most successful franchises on the NES—snagged the Bucky O'Hare license, and the second I found out that my new obsession was coming to the NES, I couldn't wait to get my hands on it. You really rolled the dice when picking up a licensed game for the NES, but with Konami at the helm, chances are you would be getting a quality product, which is exactly what *Bucky O'Hare* is. It's easily one of the hidden gems of the NES library, due in large part to its terrific soundtrack and how it takes inspiration from one of my favorite franchises, *Mega Man*.

The game opens with a stage select, and upon completing the four opening levels you add a member of your crew to your party, each with their own unique abilities like Deadeye Duck, who can climb on walls. *Bucky O'Hare* found a second life in recent years when Dave Clark, a.k.a. Pacnsacdave, modded it and turned it into a *Guardians of the Galaxy* game, which I highly recommend. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

The Bugs Bunny Birthday Blowout

PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Kemco
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



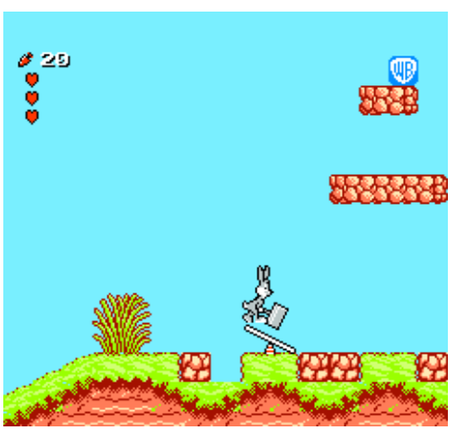
It's Bugs Bunny's 50th birthday and his fan club has planned a party. In true Looney Tunes fashion, the rest of the Looney Tunes bunch aren't happy about it. As such, Daffy Duck and company have planted contraptions along the pathway that the rabbit must follow to reach his birthday bash. As the long-eared Wascally Wabbit himself, your job is to make it to the party. As you walk, jump, and climb toward your destination, you'll run across your fellow cartoon characters and their numerous contraptions. These contraptions, which can prove quite lethal, include poisonous frogs, walking time bombs, spring-loaded weights, malicious mallets, ghosts, jumping telescopic bullet sprinklers, and other hair-raising instruments of evil. You must avoid these characters and traps or smash them with your trusty hammer. At certain points during the game you can enter boulder wells, which are entrances to secret passages. At the end of each round, depending on how many carrots you have gathered during your journey, you can play Bonus Bingo to try and win extra lives.

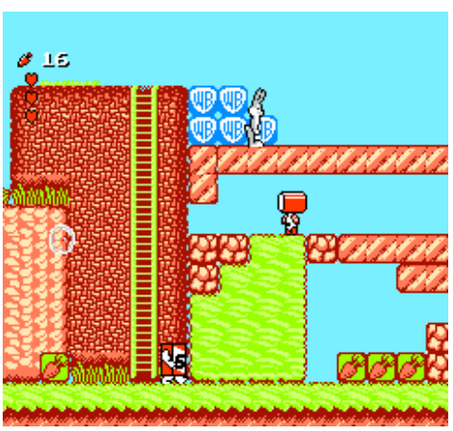
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"I can imagine that the programmers were after something that would appeal to the younger games player here. After all, the game itself is rather simplistic . . .all you do is run around the platform environment dodging (or beating up) the meanies and collecting carrots. This wouldn't be too bad if the action was fast, fluid, and fun, but *Bugs Bunny's Birthday Blow Out* is slow, very jerky, and extremely boring. Considering that this is a cartoon license, graphics are very important. Unfortunately, what we have here are mournful, misshapen sprites and Lego-style blocky backdrops. The sound is also a forlorn debacle, boasting sad effects and horrendously twee music. The only good point about the game is the presentation. At least here the graphical representations of the cartoon characters are fairly close to the originals. Other than that *Bugs Bunny* is a shallow, completely unenjoyable game that you'd do well to avoid, even if you're an ardent Loony Tunes addict." —*Mean Machines* (April 1992)

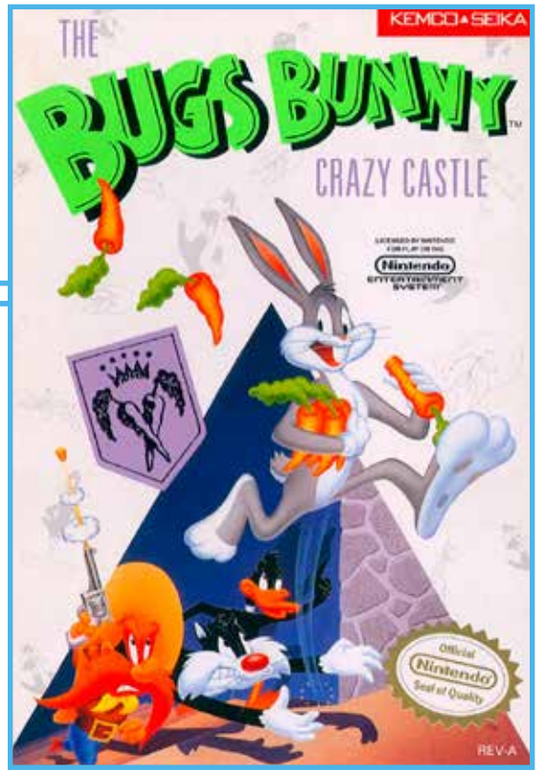
Insider Insight: *Bug's Bunny Birthday Blowout* is standard platforming fare and quite plain, with a lack of detail compared to games like *Super Mario Bros. 3*. It did pass a lot of time for me when I was a kid, even though I'd get a little bored during certain sections of the game. At times it almost felt like a grind. Ah, the freedom of youth and having so much free time that you could play a game for hours that you felt was decidedly mediocre. I do remember getting to the point where I wanted to finish the game quickly and never play it again. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality





The Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle

PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Kemco
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Vertical Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Originally a Roger Rabbit game on the Famicom, *The Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle* lots of walking and climbing up stairs. Bugs Bunny is a freaking rabbit, so you'd think he could also hop, right? Not in *Crazy Castle*, which makes for a rather limited game (and stretches the definition of a platformer). The Wascally Wabbit's objective is to rescue Honey Bunny, which requires maneuvering through 60 relatively unadorned levels of play, climbing stairs, entering doorways and pipes, gathering carrots, and avoiding Daffy Duck, Sylvester, Wiley Coyote, and Yosemite Sam. Bugs can drink magic carrot juice for invisibility, don a single-use boxing glove projectile weapon, and drop safes, crates, buckets, and weights on the bad guys. Unfortunately, none of these things can make him hop—he's a *bunny*, for gosh sakes, let him jump!

OSCHIFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

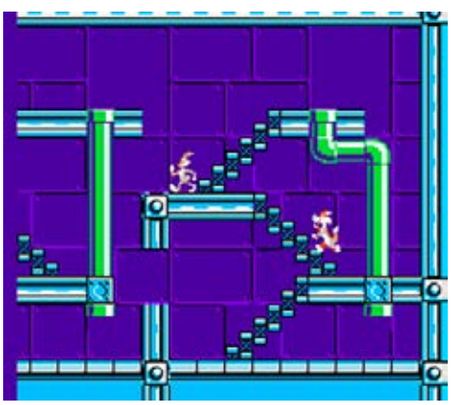
"Like *Mickey Mousecapade*, this is an ideal game for the entire family. Though experienced players will find it somewhat simple, the graphics are charming and it's still enjoyable. The characters are well-delineated . . . Okay music . . .disappointingly, there's no 'What's up, Doc?'" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games III* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Ideal for novices and younger players. The graphics are fairly good, and though the game is short on creativity, it's fun. Pushing an object onto an unsuspecting Sylvester is definitely a lark. The similarities between levels is disappointing . . . There's not enough variety or difference in difficulty to motivate players to move all the way to the 60th level . . .probably won't hold the interest of more sophisticated gamers." —*Gamer Player's* (December 1989)

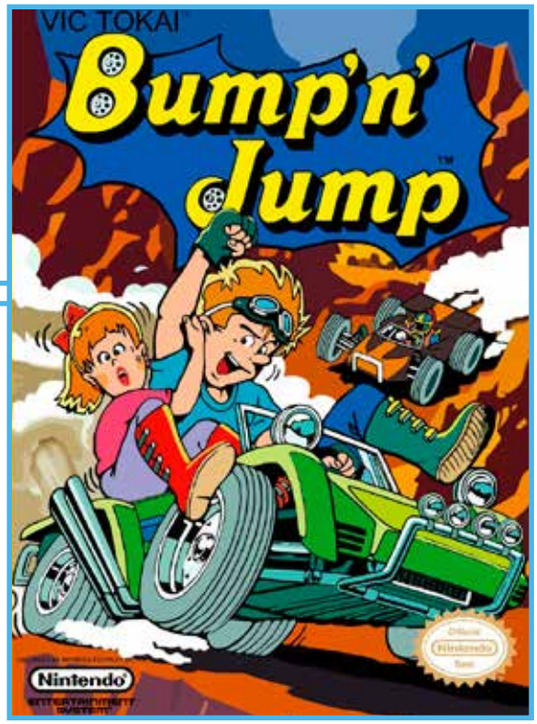
Notable Quotable:

"*Crazy Castle* is essentially a maze game, sort of a side-scrolling *Pac-Man* with cartoon characters . . . The levels start out extremely basic . . . However, it isn't long before you're having to map out which carrots to get first and which paths are the least dangerous. There's a lot of skill involved with beating some of the later levels . . . The graphics and sound are okay . . . Bugs is small and made up of only a couple of colors. The same goes for the supporting cast, which often makes them look even goofier than they do in the actual cartoons. You'll also find that many enemies are repeated with color swaps . . .sluggish controls . . . It's not always easy to turn around at a moment's notice, and don't even think about changing direction when you're climbing stairs." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)



Bump 'n' Jump

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS
GAME TYPE: Demolition/ Combat Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



Similar in some respects to the coin-op classic *Spy Hunter*, *Bump 'n' Jump* is viewed from a top-down perspective, with gamers racing up roadways (in this case city, country yard, mountain, and seaside roadways). Instead of shooting other cars, gamers bump them into obstacles or jump on top of them. Gamers must also use their car to jump over water, buildings, and other road hazards (flashing exclamation points warn of such dangers). Enemy vehicles to crush or avoid include patrol cars, ambulances, jeeps, buggies, trucks (which deposit sand on the road), fuel trucks (which dump oil), cement mixers (which emit concrete), and more. The game is a nice port of the 1982 Bally/Midway coin-op classic, going so far as to add an extra component: power barrels to pick up for fuel and energy. Jumping is only allowable when the car has reached 150 km/hour, but the "Jump Ok!" text alert from the arcade game is missing.

Memories: I'm a huge fan of the NES, ColecoVision, and Intellivision versions of *Bump 'n' Jump*. Each is masterfully ported from the excellent arcade game. Lately I've been playing the game on the Wii in the form of *Burnin' Rubber*, which is what the arcade game was called in Japan. It is part of the *Data East Arcade Classics* collection, which is getting hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

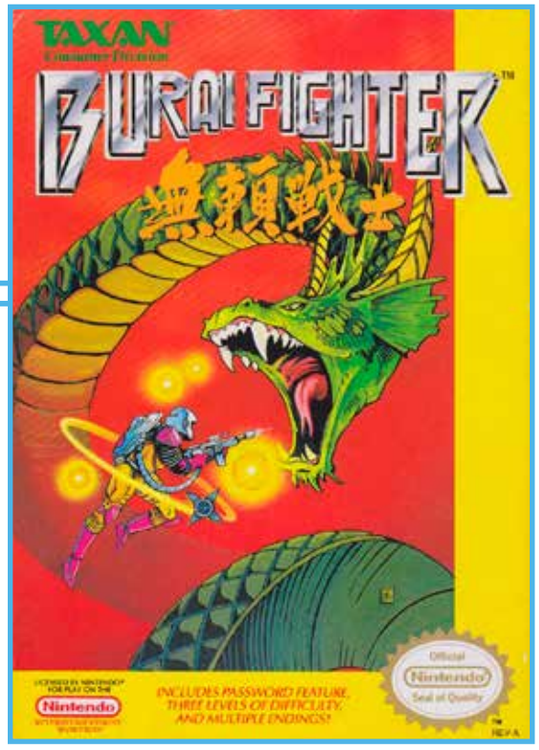
"The music and sound effects are very well done. The graphics, however, offer little to get excited about. All shapes are distinct and easily recognized, but the use of patterns—particularly for some of the backgrounds—leaves much to be desired . . . The controls are simple and easy to use. Almost anyone should be able to finish the first level or two. A continue option would have added to its replay value . . .beginning with the third level, the road gets narrow and treacherous." —*Compute's Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Insider Insight: *Bump 'n' Jump* is one of those NES titles that flew under the radar for me. In fact, I didn't play the game until 2012, when I made a video for my YouTube channel with OkChief and The Game Chasers. I found the game to be an awesome arcade racer that is full of complete chaos, with you jumping over large obstacles and bumping your enemies off the track. The graphics and presentation are cartoony and a little silly at times, but it fits with the arcade gameplay and overall feel of the action. It's one of those fun games that is easy to pick up and play and is especially enjoyable in a group setting. Filming the video with my friends definitely brought lots of laughter and memories, even though it was our first time playing the game. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTuber personality

OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Burai Fighter

PUBLISHER: Taxan
DEVELOPER: KID Corp
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



A nicely designed shooter with excellent controls, *Burai Fighter* features seven levels of play, two of which are viewed from a top-down perspective and require that the player—moving freely—locate and destroy a base, meaning it's relatively easy to get lost (despite the inclusion of a radar display). Instead of a ship, this game features a man wearing a proton pack. He begins with a simple eight-way gun (the ability to hold a shooting position while maneuvering around by holding the B button is very useful), but can grab three different weapons—laser, missile, and ring—each of which has three power levels. Additional pick-ups include speed, cobalt bombs, and rotating pods, the last of which evokes the more-popular shooter *R-Type*. Creatively named enemies, which the manual calls robo-mutants, include such curious creatures as Badbug, Giganticrab, Jawsipede, Freakfly, Fataso, and Twinkletoes. Three difficulty levels are available, and you'll need those passwords for saving your progress thanks to one-hit deaths and a screen that frequently gets busy with obstacles, enemies, and enemy fire. The sequel, *Burai Fighter Deluxe* for the Game Boy, removes the top-down stages but adds multiplayer action via link cable.

Notable Quotable:
"An exemplary shooter . . .intense . . .fantastic . . .a wide variety of weapons and power-ups along with non-stop action . . .scrolling is smooth . . .excellent background graphics . . .one of the better shooters for the NES." —*Electronic Games Magazine* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"One of the best space shoot-out games of 1990! The action is fast—sometimes faster than you can stand it. Even after completing a stage, most players would be lying if they said they'd mastered it . . .you'll want to play it again and again." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics and sound are quite pleasing, but the monotony of the challenge fails to thrill me at all. Why is the game so hard? There's nothing wrong with a stiff fight, but when the slow-moving bullets give the player no chance to escape their path it tends to stop the game from being fun. I think that a lack of genuine enthusiasm from the programmers has resulted in a mediocre game here and there are much better shoot-'em-ups available for the Nintendo (like *Life Force*). – *Mean Machines* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are actually pretty good. Each of the stages has its own look, with bright colors and some nice backgrounds. The different character sprites look great and sport some good details and smooth animation, especially the large bosses you encounter. There is some breakup when the action gets intense, but no slowdown. The sound is also decent . . . While *Burai Fighter* doesn't necessarily break much new ground, that doesn't mean it's not worth at least a look. The gameplay is solid enough to satisfy shmup fans, and the different features help it seem like slightly more than just another space title. It may not give the top titles a run for their money, but *Burai Fighter* is another long-forgotten NES title that at least deserves a look." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net)

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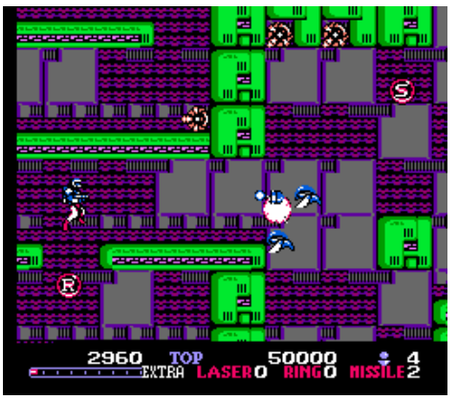
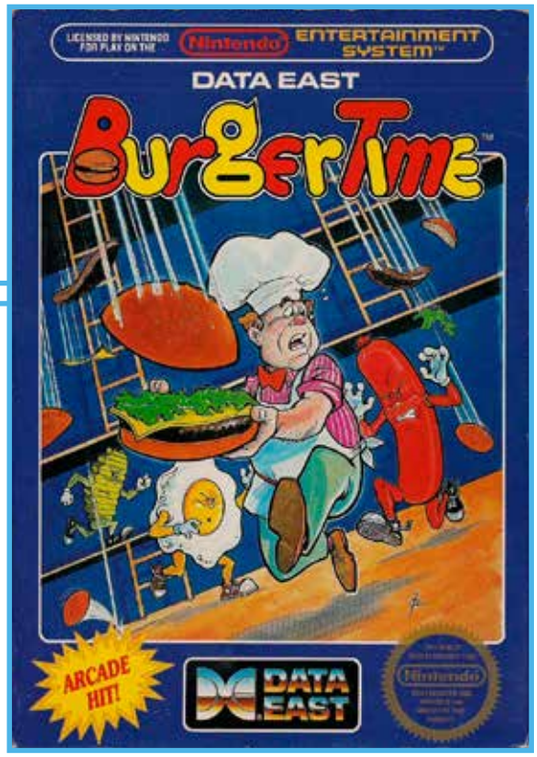


BurgerTime

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987



You are chef Peter Pepper, and it is your job to make giant hamburgers. The individual parts of the burgers are lined vertically and are situated on several levels of platforms. You must climb from level to level on ladders and walk over the length of the meat patties, buns, and garnish to drop them down (level by level) to the bottom of the playfield, effectively stacking them on plates. While building your burgers you'll be chased by frankfurters, eggs, and pickle slices. You can crush these cute culinary creatures by walking over a hamburger part while they are either in the path of or on the part you walk over. Also, you can temporarily stun an enemy by shaking pepper on it. You earn extra pepper by eating bonus ice cream cones, coffee, and French fries that periodically appear on the playfield. Getting trapped while out of pepper is frustrating, but that's part of the challenge of this hardcore climbing game that has elements of a maze title. When all of the burgers have been built you move on to the next, more-difficult level. Though missing a few flourishes from the introductory sequence (including character names and pictures), *BurgerTime* for the NES is a finely programmed port of Bally/Midway's 1982 arcade classic, which is a favorite among retro gamers.

Memories: I've always been a huge fan of what they used to call "climbing" games, such as *Donkey Kong*, *Space Panic*, and *Beauty and the Beast* (Intellivision). I spent a lot of time with *BurgerTime* as well, but it's always been a frustrating game to me because of the limited amount of pepper. I always seem to get trapped in a corner with no way out, but it doesn't keep me from coming back for more burger stacking.

Notable Quotable:
"The crisp graphics and toe-tapping soundtrack are terrific, but the controls certainly could be more forgiving. You need to perfectly line up your chef with the platforms to walk across them, and it's easy to get hung up just as evil processed meat products are converging. It's also annoying how enemies tend to respawn near the edge of the screen without warning. Still, *BurgerTime* is timeless fun, and its deceptively simple gameplay will give even the most seasoned gamers fits." - Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight: *BurgerTime* is an absolute arcade classic. It helps that I love hamburgers and can eat them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You control a burger chef whose goal is to stack all the ingredients of each burger while avoiding the enemies on the stage. It's in the same vein of games like *Donkey Kong* and others of that era. As a kid I really didn't have interest in simple games like this, so it wasn't in my collection. I had friends who owned it, though, and I'd find myself bored and/or frustrated with the simple arcade gameplay. As a child I definitely didn't appreciate it as much as I do now as an adult. It's a quick, pick-up-and-play game that has aged well. It's not talked about as much as it should be, so I decided to talk (or at least write) about it here. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

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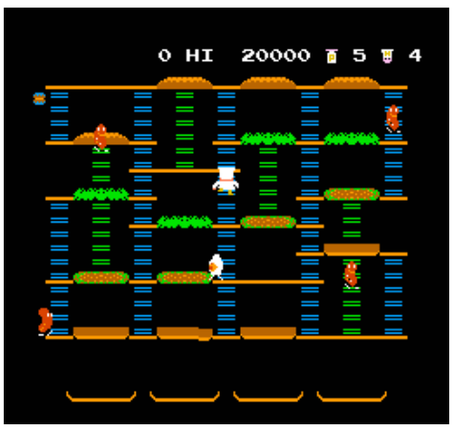
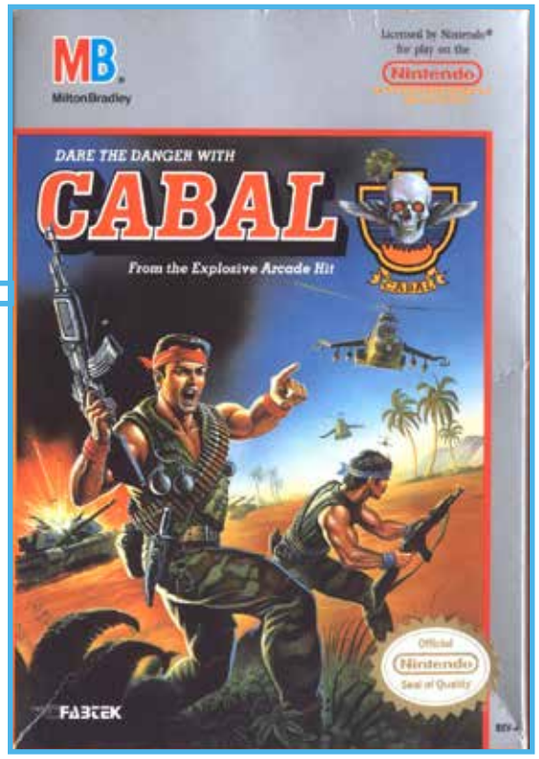


Cabal

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



Based on the 1988 Fabtek arcade game, which offered sharper graphics and trackball control (on certain cabinets), *Cabal* h[illegible]vers viewing a soldier from behind as he [illegible]vers right and left (including jumping, ducking, and rolling), firing an assault rifle, a machine gun, and a grenade launcher at battle tanks, choppers, sharpshooters, and other enemies. There are five areas to battle through, including an old village, the beach, naval headquarters, the jungle, and the mountains. Unlike most shooters of this type, where you simply aim a crosshair and fire, here you must guide a crosshair while simultaneously maneuvering your character. This control scheme can be awkward and frustrating, especially for the beginner. Another quirk is that the A button is used for two kinds of firepower—hold it down and you shoot bullets, but tapping it releases grenades. Although there are five different levels the action is repetitious, and the constant aiming, running, and shooting becomes more tedious than intense.

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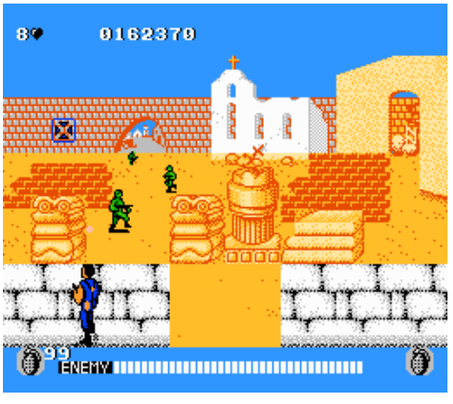
Notable Quotable:

"One of the other more original features of *Cabal* is the way you can both destroy (with several hits) and hide behind large parts of the scenery, using it as a shield . . .a pretty poor conversion . . .graphics are very simple, lacking in detail and feature some awful color choices . . .horrendous sprite flicker and slowdown . . .the effects and music are pretty decent . . . As such a huge fan of *Cabal* I really wanted to love this NES version, but I just cannot hide my disappointment. It's not that NES *Cabal* is a terrible game by any means—far from it—but it's just not the game it could have been." —Hey Poor Player (www.heypoorplayer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"An impressively accurate conversion . . . Though less colorful and detailed, the graphics on this port are shockingly faithful to the original arcade title . . . The sound is terrible, but this is a result of its adherence to its source material; though the music is obnoxious and annoying, it stays true to the original, lacking only the digitized shooting and (hilarious) screaming effects of the coin-op . . .a good, challenging single-player game, but it really shines in its two-player cooperative mode. The allowance for coordinated strategy adds a great deal to the game, and even though it makes for an easier experience, a second player makes the game much more chaotic and fun." —Anthony Ball (www.nintendocomplete.com)



Caesar's Palace

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates
GAME TYPE: Gambling, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992

A decent way to gamble without losing any real money (other than the price you pay for the cartridge), *Caesar's Palace* lets players blow virtual cash on five different types of Las Vegas-style games, each using standard rules: Roulette, Slot Machines (two three-reel machines and one four-reel), Video Poker, Blackjack, and The Big Six Money Wheel, the last of which is also known as Wheel of Fortune (perhaps explaining the Vanna White look-alike pictured on the box). To select a game, you move a cursor around a top-down map of the casino floor. Amusingly, you can click on the bathroom door to take a break. After cashing out your chips, you'll leave the casino in a vehicle such as a bus, a limo, or a sports car, depending on how much money you accumulated. Naturally, the game is not as sophisticated as *Super Caesar's Palace* for the Super NES, which lets gamers walk around the casino playing such games as Scratches, Keno, and Red Dog, but it's a solid, playable collection of gambling simulators.

Memories: Gambling video games lack the excitement of real gambling, since there's no chance of losing or gaining real money, but I suppose you could gather your friends around *Caesar's Palace* and place actual bets on the games. Come to think of it, you could do this with any video game. Hey, maybe I've started something here . . .

Notable Quotable:

"A passable collection of casino games . . . The interior of the deserted-looking casino is decently rendered, but serves no real function. The games move at a slow pace and often don't reflect what you'd find in a real casino, such as video poker machines that make you discard rather than hold." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A worse version of *Vegas Dreams*. However, it is superior in one way—it has Video Poker. While Video Poker is nowhere near as fun as actual poker, it is my favorite of the available games. The disadvantage is that it has no password system, multiplayer options, or Keno . . . The graphics are quite nice." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The music sounds EXACTLY like *Maniac Mansion* . . . Much like the real casino, I found myself wandering back and forth between games, testing my luck until I got on a lucky streak . . . I think I had to reset the game like three or four times before I actually started winning money. I would blow everything I had in the first few hands . . . Slots is by far the worst way to win . . . Video Poker at least involves a bit of strategy, but I swear to God the computer was out to get me. I don't think I ever drew the card I was looking for . . . You want to have fun? Grab a group of friends, a few beers, and play some Texas Hold 'Em . . . Leave this game to the dust on your shelf." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

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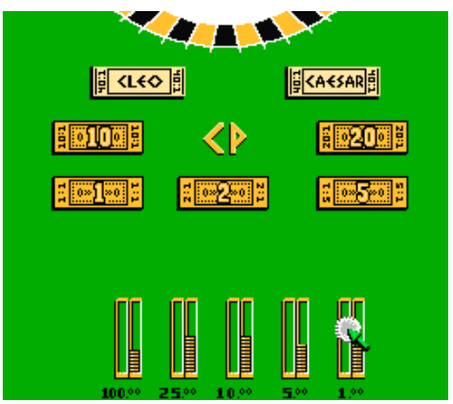

California Games

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Sports/Extreme, 1–8 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989

Like the original computer release (Epyx, 1987), which broke ground for extreme sports video games, *California Games* for the NES includes six events: Half Pipe Skateboarding (side-view, perform stunts while riding back and forth on a ramp); BMX Bike Racing (side-view, perform jumps, wheelies, flips, 360s, and table tops); Surfing (ride the wave, catch air, perform 360s); Roller Skating (skate boardwalk, jump, avoid obstacles); Flying Disk (throw a Frisbee back-and-forth); and Foot Bag (a.k.a. hacky sack). After every event trophies are awarded to the top finishers. A Practice mode is available, but you can't compete against the computer.

Notable Quotable:

"Each of the games has its own individual challenges, and though Roller Skating and BMX Bike Racing are annoyingly similar, the cartridge as a whole is unique and satisfying . . .so-so cartoon-style animation . . . The skateboarding and surfing segments aren't as challenging as those in *Town & Country Surf Designs: Wood & Water Rage* and *Skate or Die*. On the other hand the controls are easier to master and, ultimately, you'll probably have more fun with *California Games*." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Pretty standard fare for games like this . . . must have been done better elsewhere . . . You'd better find a manual if you want to play at all, as you're expected to come in as a pro to the concepts in the events, as well as the controls. The game never clues you in on the most basic of actions. Trying every button on the half pipe results in you falling or slowing to a stop. Kicking the hacky sack usually results in it being knocked too far away for you to kick again and keep in the air." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"There is no CPU challenge for one player, which seems a little off . . . I like the Half Pipe . . . The stage is colorful and it works well, despite the repetitive music; pulling off tricks is a joy. The surfing stage is hilarious, mostly because our friend Jaws randomly appears if you wipe out . . . The BMX stage is also passable, even though the dynamics are a little wacky . . .average collection of games that represent no challenge for the lone gamer, some horrendous product placement (I'll let you discover that), and not enough content for a decent multiplayer experience." —Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)

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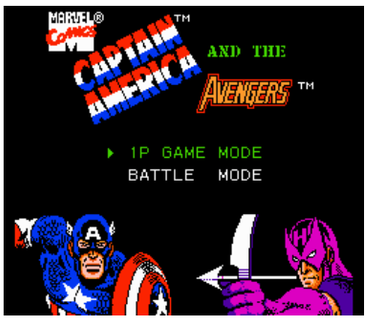
Insider Insight: There's no doubting that *California Games* is Epyx's most famous and iconic game. It was also their most successful, having been converted to almost every console and computer of the time. It's been a huge favorite of mine over the years and a game I've purchased for numerous systems. Just off the top of my head, I have versions for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, Atari ST, Sega Master System, Atari Lynx, Atari 2600, Nintendo NES, Commodore 64, and Sega Mega Drive. One of the main reasons for this is because it's such a great multi-player game—the perfect title to pull out when you have a few friends round.

In recent, years I've gotten to know some of the many people behind creating *California Games*, including its original creator and designer, Matt Householder. Each version of *California Games* was slightly different from the other and I've always wondered why. Matt informed me that although it was very much his creation, he always gave the individual programmers creative freedom with their respective version. This resulted in the unique stunt race BMX event on the 2600, the beach ball bursting variation of the surfing in the Mega Drive/Genesis port, and Comlynx fighting in the Atari Lynx footbag, to name a few examples. However, the NES conversion remains remarkably close to the Commodore 64 original. It has all six events with the classic music, all the options, and the ability to play with up to eight players! For these reasons it remains one of the best versions and is up there among my favorite games for the system. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

Captain America and the Avengers

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Data East
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Released the same year as Data East's excellent arcade cab of the same name, *Captain America and the Avengers* for the NES is entirely different game. It's an original (if derivitious) creation in which players, as either Captain America or Hawkeye (depending on the stage and on the character selected), must battle armed soldiers, face off against bosses (including Wizard, Mandarin, Ultron, and Crossbones), jump on platforms and over obstacles, activate switches to turn off hazards, find the exit to each level, and rescue Iron Man and Vision from the Red Skull. Captain America throws his mighty shield while Hawkeye fires arrows. Both can punch, but Hawkeye is more fun to control since he can shoot while jumping. A special non-scrolling Battle Mode lets player one fight as Captain America or Hawkeye against player two, who can select from Crossbones, Ultron, and Wizard. The best, most evenly matched competition is Hawkeye vs. Ultron.

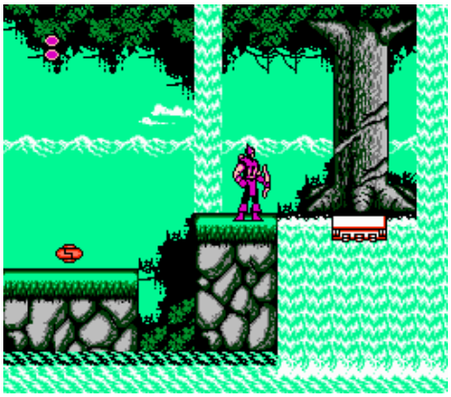
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"All the heroes and supervillain bosses look like and have the same powers as their comic book counterparts. The action onscreen perfectly captures the spirit and fun of wham-bam-pow comic book fight scenes . . .a solid, action-packed game sure to please gamers and comic book fans alike." —*GamePro* (February 1992)

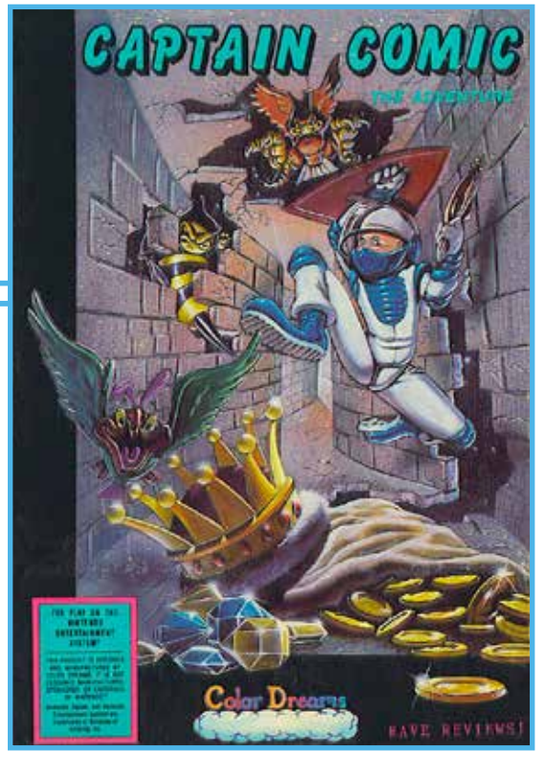
Insider Insight: In the months leading up to *The Avengers* feature film from 2012 I could hardly contain my excitement. At a midnight screening opening weekend my friends and I dressed up as the characters, and I picked Captain America, who had become my favorite Avenger after 2011's *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Not long after I watched *The Avengers*, I caught a video on YouTube from Pat "The NES Punk" Contri about *Captain America and The Avengers* on the NES. I had heard about the arcade game and played its terrible SNES port, but I had no idea an NES game even existed.

I was happy to discover that it was a completely unique game and starred Captain America. Needless to say, it wasn't long until I found myself buying a copy from eBay. Superheroes didn't really get the best treatment on the NES, but this game does surprisingly well by its lead. Not only is Cap's sprite accurate, he can charge enemies with his vibranium shield and throw it like a boomerang at enemies in the distance. It is a tough game to recommend, as it really only has two music tracks and a handful of level types it recycles over and over, but for someone hungry for anything related to the Star-Spangled Avenger it was a purchase I'll never regret. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*



Captain Comic: The Adventure

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams
DEVELOPER: Michael Denio
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Adapted from Michael Denio's 1988 shareware PC game, *Captain Comic: The Adventures*, is the best cartridge in Color Dreams' [illegible]edly weak library of NES titles. On a quest to recover stolen treasure, players guide Captain Comic as he runs, jumps (precision jumping is frequently required), and shoots his way through eight non-linear, nicely rendered (relatively speaking) levels of planet Tambia. Level settings include daytime, nighttime, a castle, underground caverns, the moon, and a master computer. Enemies include such mundane pests as birds and worms, but also such oddly named creatures as Phlegmatism, Trimodel Ectosphere, and BirdBrother Skip.

All the items from the PC game remain intact, including keys, boots (for jumping higher), transport wands, lanterns (for lighting caves), corkscrew bullets (which have a spiral trajectory), and Blastola Cola (ammo), which increases your firing capacity. A special shield of invulnerability briefly charges your shields and weapon, keeping you free from harm and giving you unlimited firepower. Captain Comic, who must collect three artifacts to beat the game, can't duck, and he can only shoot right and left, causing some cheap hits. Classical music plays throughout. If the controls were crisper and Captain Comic were more versatile in his maneuverability and directional shooting the game would rise above the middle of the pack. Unlicensed.

Memories: During the late 1980s and early 1990s I was a manager at Lone Star Comics in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. After that I co-owned a pair of stores called Fantastic Comics & Cards. I've been a superhero fan since I was a kid watching *The Adventures of Superman*, "Spidey Super Stories" (a recurring *Electric Company* skit), *Super Friends*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Wonder Woman* on television. I also started reading comic books at an early age. Any time I run across a video game starring a superhero, even unlicensed fare like *Captain Comic*, I like to at least give it a try. I've certainly played worse.

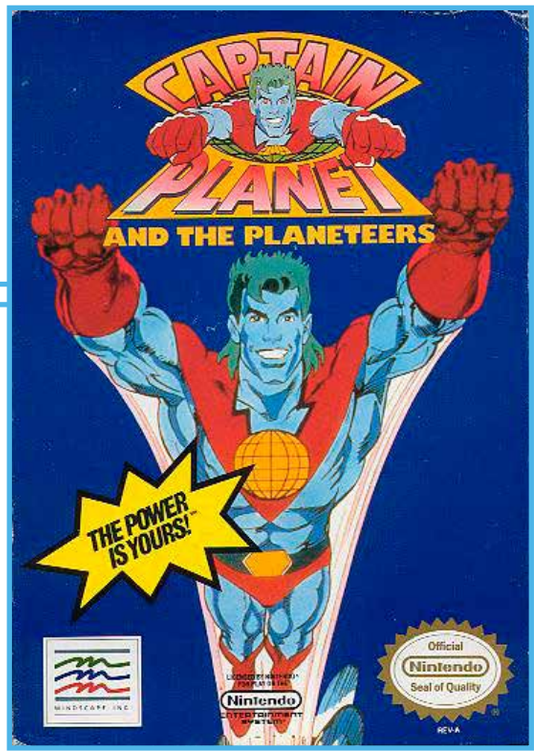
Notable Quotable:

"Attempts to duplicate other side-scrolling action games . . . Combines lousy gameplay and poorly drawn characters with average backgrounds and a theme that is sorely lacking power-ups and bosses and you get a nice first try from Color Dreams. I expected more and hope they do better with their next game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1990)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Captain Planet and the Planeteers

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Chris Gray Enterprises
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Based on the environmentally friendly cartoon series that ran from 1990 to 1996, *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* puts players in the role of the blue-skinned superhero who is the physical embodiment of the five Planeteers' ring powers: earth, wind, fire, water, and heart. During the first part of each of the game's five levels (the "outside" sections), players pilot a geo-cruiser, an eco-copter, or an eco-sub, using the aforementioned ring powers to shoot enemy ships, drop rocks to plug up oil refinery smokestacks, and more. During the second part of each level (the "inside" sections) Captain Planet flies around dodging pollution and punching robots. Freeing animals from traps also plays a role. Throughout the game Captain Planet can grab a number of power-ups, including shields, faster shots, triple shots, and larger fire, rocks, and water, but the levels are tough to get through nevertheless.

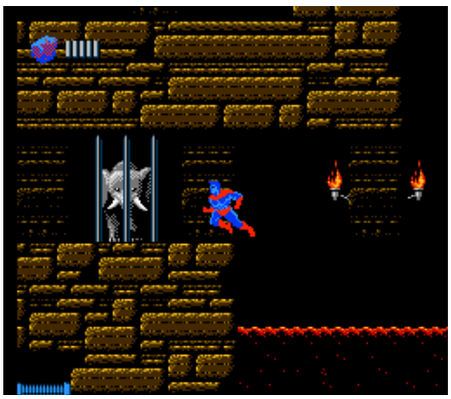
Notable Quotable:

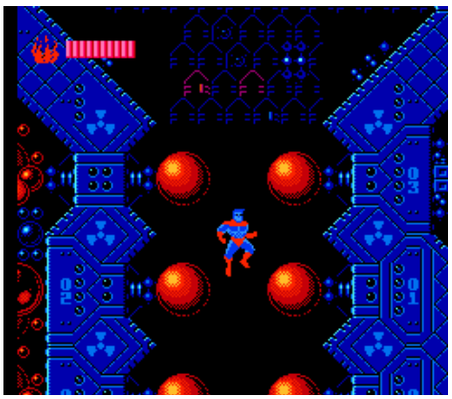
"This game is very difficult! Part of the difficulty is pure mechanics . . . I've seen very few games that focus attacks so close to the player. In most games one tries to distance oneself from harm. That's not always possible in *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. Very often you need to skirt danger to avoid it. Similarly, many weapons are only effective at close range. It's definitely a different style of gameplay . . .vibrant colors and graphics . . .good controls." —8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Captain Planet* was bad enough as a cartoon, and it would seem the game is perfectly in keeping with this image. At first it doesn't seem so bad, although the shoot-'em-up elements fail to tie in with the cartoon. But once you've been killed in the same spot for what feels like the hundredth time the whole thing wears more than a little thin. The exploration part of the game is mildly diverting, but it's all a bit dull, unimaginative, and repetitive. *Captain Planet*'s sad graphics and sound could be excused if it weren't for the game's habit of placing you in an impossible position from which there is no escape." —*Mean Machines* (December 1991)

Insider Insight: Fun fact: I believe I can save the world. Ask my students—I'm serious. Part of it stems from my adoration of Barbara Gordon, a librarian who fought crime as Batgirl and Oracle. Most of it comes from refusing to give up hope in the face of challenges and wanting to share that strength with others. And some can be attributed to *Captain Planet*. The cartoon hit hard on my desire to be more than an average kid and made me believe that, by our powers combined, we could make a difference. My neighbor got the NES game and tired of it quickly. I get that each level was pretty much the same, so it wasn't all that engaging. It was also an unexpected contradiction, with a lot of destruction in the effort to save the planet. But the art in this game is beautiful, and if you're able to suspend disbelief to invest your imagination in it you can have a lot of fun saving the world. I do wish there was more emphasis on how it was cooperation and shared strengths that allowed them to defeat villains, because this concept begged to be a multiplayer game. I also wish the boss battles incorporated more elements from the cartoon, but for a TV tie-in game, this was one of the best. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Captain Skyhawk

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

A game you see frequently among certain sports titles and other cheap, common NES cartridges, *Captain Skyhawk* was heavily advertised on TV and in magazines at the time of its release. It is an entertaining shooter that puts players in the cockpit of an F14VTS fighter, using a cannon, intercept missiles, air-to-ground missiles, and hawk bombs to fend off an alien invasion. Mission objectives include docking with space stations, dropping off supplies, picking up a scientist, destroying an alien space station and, of course, destroying enemy planes. The viewpoint is from above the action (thanks to a spy satellite viewer) and the jet fighter, which flies over angular mountains and geometric landscapes, can climb up, dive down, and bank and barrel roll left and right. Effective quasi-3D graphics and a nice variety of objectives make *Captain Skyhawk* a solid entry in the NES library.

Notable Quotable:

"The game is a mish-mash of contrasting styles, from *Zaxxon* to *AfterBurner* to *Elite* . . .isn't a bad game as such; in fact I quite enjoyed playing it for a time until I realized how ordinary it is . . . So-so graphics, disappointing sound, and a difficulty setting which seems to drop the farther you progress." —*Computer and Video Games* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:

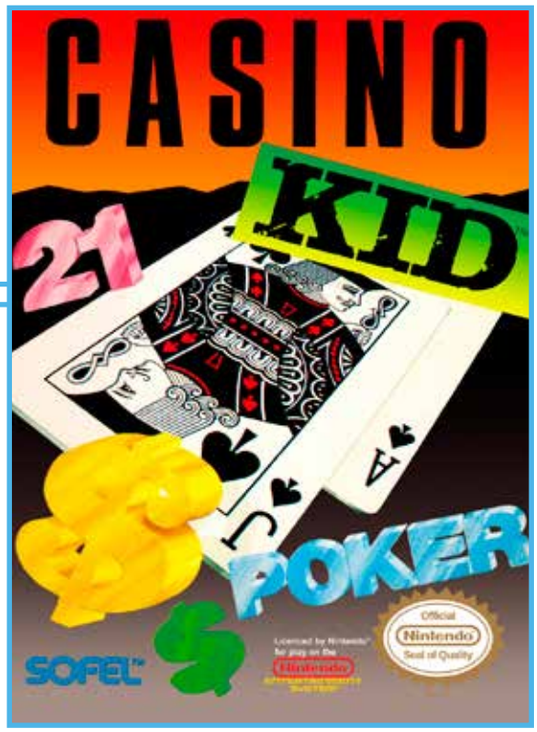
"Graphics are excellent . . .sprites are varied and well-animated . . . The sound's decent as well, with accomplished tunes and spot-on effects. But it's the playability that counts, and *Captain Skyhawk* is simply superb! The inertia on the F-14 is excellent, and the gameplay is very challenging, with loads of levels to conquer. I particularly like the level where the wings stay swept back and Skyhawk has to negotiate the landscape travelling at supersonic speeds without crashing." —*Mean Machines* (July 1991)

Insider Insight: *Captain Skyhawk* was one of the first "3D" experiences I ever had with a game. My grandparents came over for Christmas one year and this was the gift they gave me. Sure, it's far from the best game on the NES, but it has a unique quality that makes it underrated. The first thing that caught my eye was the 3D type of environment and ships that you see. At the time I was impressed with it, but it is very difficult. The ship at times feels like it controls a little too loosely, and it's so fast I often found myself crashing into the enemies or environmental obstacles. While it can get incredibly frustrating, the game does hold a dear place in my heart simply for the fact that my grandparents got it for me as a Christmas gift. It might not be the best game in the library, but my rose-tinted glasses say that it is at least worth having in your collection. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Casino Kid

PUBLISHER: Sofel
DEVELOPER: Sofel
GAME TYPE: Gambling, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Can't afford a trip to Vegas? Try *Casino Kid*, where you walk around the "Golden Crumbs" casino (viewed from overhead), hitting up other gamblers to play Blackjack or five-card draw Poker. Both games play pretty well (Blackjack includes doubling down, surrendering, and splitting the hand) but exploring the casino is tedious thanks to many gamblers turning you down (you must play the casino denizens in a set order). Also, the computer tends to display an unrealistic percentage of really good poker hands, and you and the computer oftentimes have similar hands. After beating all the casino players the Casino Kid is transported to a mansion—with dramatic music to match—where he must play Poker against King, a high stakes gambler who is hard to beat. You begin the game with $500. Solid graphics, but the format needs to be tweaked a bit, which is what happened in the sequel.

Notable Quotable:
"The green, purple schema could have been lifted right off a Spectrum or Amstrad. The NES can handle over 20 colors, people! . . . Most of the lobby, and yes it looks like a hotel lobby, is blocked off. I tried to get a game of Roulette only to discover that it's been removed from the US version (grrr) . . .with its lurid graphics, awful sound, and gameplay, this feels like anti-gambling propaganda." —Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"An enjoyable game. It's never terribly hard to win the competitions . . .even if you lose everything you get a password (30 letters long) that allows you to reenter the game with all the money you lost . . .it's questionable whether the game can hold the interest of adults for very long. Players who like to gamble without risking their bank accounts will have fun with *Casino Kid*, though they might wish for the addition of a roulette wheel and slot machines." —*Game Players* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"*Casino Kid*'s soundtrack is catchy and upbeat, but rather limited . . .you'll be treated to a friendly track on the map screen and an odd jingle whenever you engage in conversation, but most of the time you're going to be listening to the selection that plays when you take on a dealer at his chosen game . . . Having the run of the casino is a nice twist . . . Some might find its layout a little bit confusing, since you're only allowed to take on dealers in a given game in a particular sequence, but those who grow accustomed to where everything is located (or simply consult a guide) should have little trouble getting around. If the limited but potent combination of Japanese RPGs, poker, and blackjack appeals to you, definitely give *Casino Kid* a try. It's not a complete casino experience, but it tells the nice, simple tale of a young man who tries (and depending on how well you play, succeeds) in making it big." —David Oxford (www.honestgamers.com)

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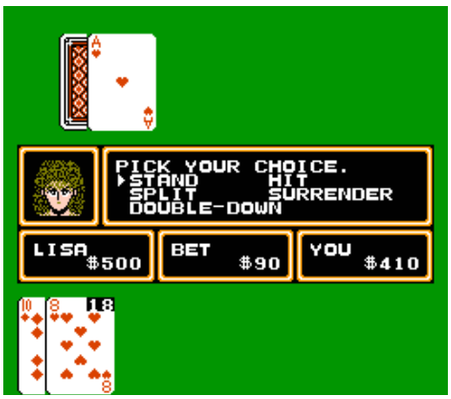
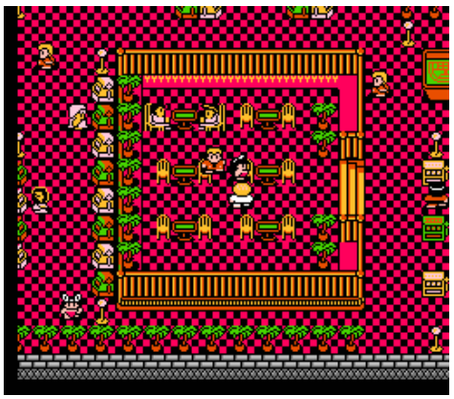
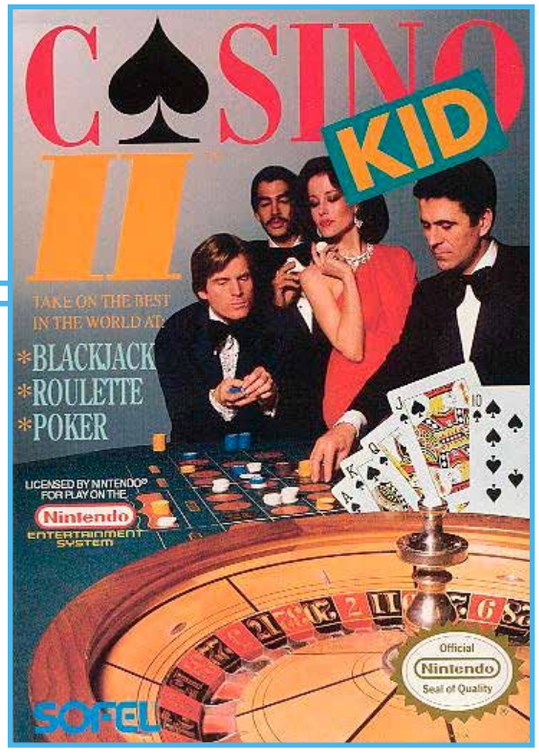




Casino Kid II

PUBLISHER: Sofel
DEVELOPER: Sofel
GAME TYPE: Gambling, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



Casino Kid II changes things up a bit. Instead of wandering around a single casino as in the original game, here you travel to different locations to take on the best gamblers in the world. The action is less tedious this time around since you can take on any of the ethnically diverse gamblers in virtually any order. Poker and Blackjack return as playable games, but now there's also Roulette (interestingly you are given hints where the ball will land, adding some strategy to the game). In addition, Poker hands seem more random, giving the game a more realistic feel. As in *Casino Kid* the cards are shown in close-up, with contestants' and dealers' faces and remarks appearing in windows, but *Casino Kid II* has better graphics and sounds.

Notable Quotable:

"*Casino Kid II*'s aesthetic changes are welcome . . . While the game's A.I. doesn't feel as cheap as the original, the core game still plays like the first . . . Poker is genuinely fun and feels fair, but Blackjack just feels cheap to me. If you ask for a hit above 13 or 14 you will almost always lose . . . Roulette is such a game of cheap luck . . .doesn't completely right the wrongs of its predecessor, but I certainly enjoyed myself more than the first." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"If you think there is more to offer in the second game, you'd be completely wrong. The only thing they managed to add to this game was Roulette . . .another boring casino game. They didn't even bother to improve upon the graphics at all, and this came out four years later . . . If you get your hand on the second game, good job. It's pretty damn rare and is one of the more valuable NES games. Use it as trade bait and get something better, though, unless you're a hardcore collector." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicus-nerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics have been marginally improved . . .better drawn character portraits and more liberal use of color . . .the new cinematics look great. The sound quality has been enhanced a great deal, often making use of drum samples to add to the fullness of the tracks, and there is a fair amount more variety in the music. Unfortunately, while good, the music is never quite as memorable or as catchy as it was in *Casino Kid.* The aesthetics are a huge step up from other NES gambling games like the bland *Vegas Dreams* or the offensively unattractive *Caesar's Palace* . . .demonstrates a respectable attempt to improve the formula established by the first game, but in its execution serves to undermine any depth the game might have had. While still a solid table game simulator, *Casino Kid II* lacks the heart that made *Casino Kid* so endearing in the first place." —NintendoComplete.com

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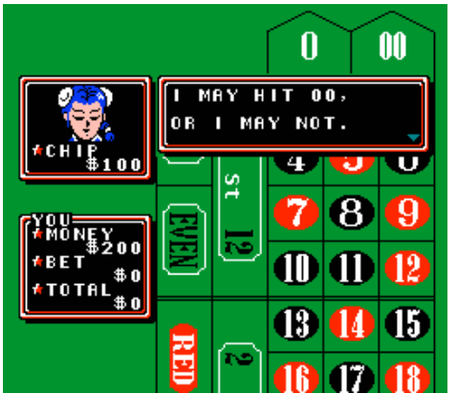


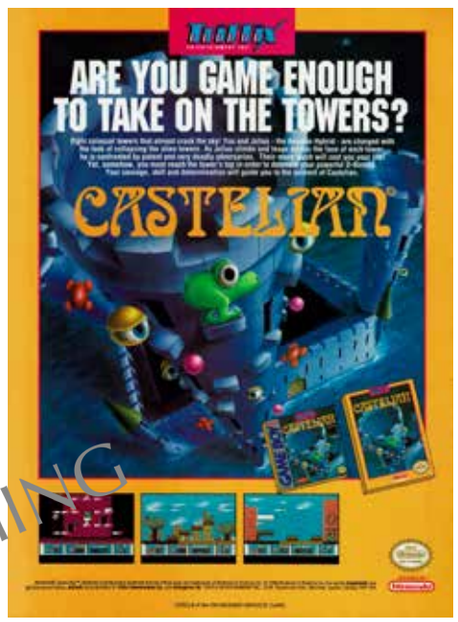
Castelian

PUBLISHER: Triffix Entertainment
DEVELOPER: BITS Studios
GAME TYPE: Climbing, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991

Patterned after a late-1980s computer game called *Nebulus*, *Castelian* is an oddly compelling (at least until frustration sets in) adventure with an impressive optical effect. Players guide a frog-like creature named Julius up eight different towers by entering doorways, jumping on platforms (some of which vanish), and going up stairs and elevators. When Julius (called Pogo in the computer version) moves right and left he stays in the center of the screen, with the tower itself rotating to simulate movement. Making things difficult are lamely illustrated (if formidable) spheres and other enemies, some of which don't die when shot. The game was released as *Tower Toppler* for the Atari 7800, but with a different storyline and different bonus rounds. *Tower Toppler* bonus rounds offer side-scrolling shooter action while *Castelian* bonus rounds have players hopping on clouds and gathering gems.

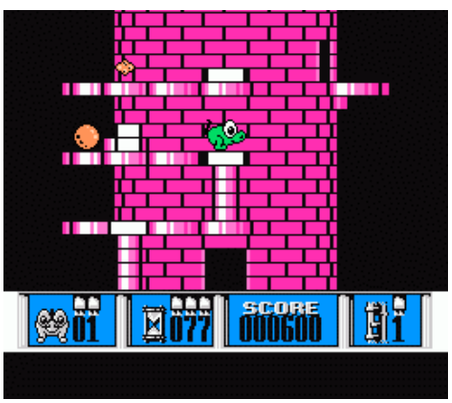
Notable Quotable:
"There isn't a lot of game in *Castelian*. It starts out as a different type of action cart but quickly becomes repetitive. The difference between each tower that you climb is negligible, and since there is plenty of challenge you end up doing the same level over and over. Boring." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"While there is certainly a little bit of action involved, *Castelian* really depends more upon puzzle-solving ability and good coordination for success . . . Visually mediocre is a fair term, as there isn't anything flashy about the land of Jammerville. I personally couldn't really get into this game, though I did play halfway through it to try and be fair about it. Sound effects are very limited: other than the opening music there isn't much there. If you are familiar with *Tower Toppler* and you liked it, *Castelian* is a faithful reproduction with an addition of bonus rounds to give it some freshness." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1991)



Notable Quotable:
"My first impression of the game was that it was pretty damn hard. I couldn't even beat the first level. Your pig/frog is not very mobile, doesn't jump very well, and there are lots of awkwardly placed ledges to fall down and enemies to run into. Then I remembered what *Metroid* and *Metal Gear* taught me: be patient! It's not about busting through the game on a single life, it's about exploring and learning the best way through the level. Once I took that approach I started to make some good progress." —The Retro Review Project www.retroreviewproject.com)

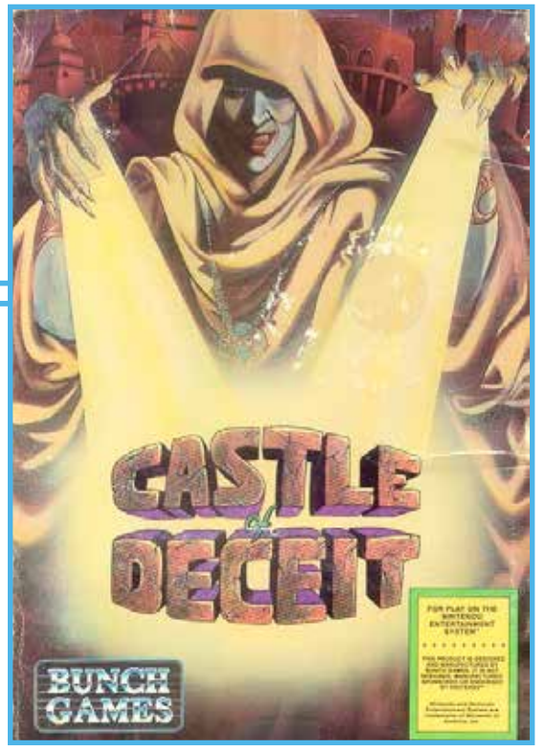
Notable Quotable:
"There are some annoying flaws, which, if removed could have made a good game into a great one. Collision detection is poor, the controls are sluggish, and some of the baddies aren't situated as well as they were in the original versions, which means that you're often guaranteed certain death unless you know exactly what's coming up. Without these niggles this would have been an outstanding, utterly addictive puzzle game, just like the original version. As it is, though, it's an enjoyable, challenging, but flawed game which some might find too frustrating to be worth persevering with." —*Mean Machines* (August 1992)

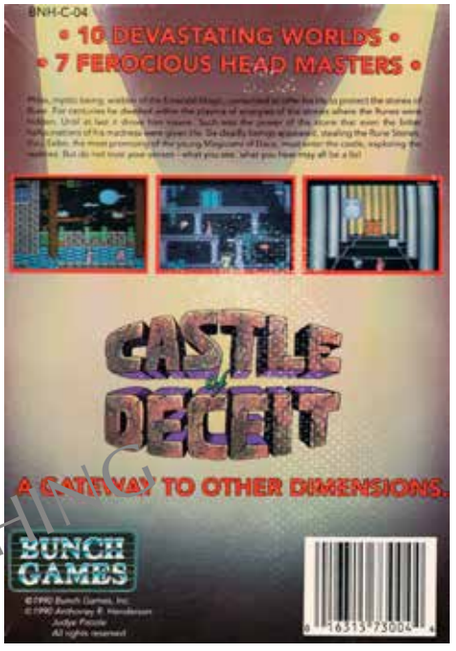


SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Castle of Deceit

PUBLISHER: Bunch Games
DEVELOPER: Bunch Games
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990





In *Castle of Deceit*, you guide a running, jumping magician through themed maze-like castles (Moons, Winds, Flame, and Illusion), firing simple spheres of magical energy (which move in a wave-like pattern) at dragons, wraiths, skulls, frogs, and other creatures. You must also find keys to enter doorways and track down and collect six interdimensional runes—there is some backtracking within each of the game's 10 levels. After making it through each castle a behind-the-magician perspective boss battle ensues, where you fire your wand upward and quickly, more like a shooter. Sounds good on paper, but when you play it, you'll see that it's hampered by sluggish controls, mediocre (at best) graphics, redundant music, and glitches (you can walk on air in spots). Enemy A.I. is interesting, as some of the baddies will actually dodge your attacks. Many are odd looking creatures resembling butterflies, monkeys, and the like. You'll also face fish, skulls, and flying eyeballs. Unlicensed and hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"The first thing that catches my eye is my guy. He basically has no animation whatsoever. He just kinda waddles around, and when he jumps, his feet kinda wiggle a little . . . The platforming seems really weird . . . At first the game seems pretty hard, and it definitely is, especially since there's no save feature, but eventually you get the hang of it." —PeanutButterGamer (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"This is an odd game. A bad game, to be sure, but one that's bad in a specific way: it takes the common elements of any given NES hop-n-bop platformer and then gets them all subtly wrong. On a basic level it's almost competent, weird jumping physics aside, but as soon as anything else is added to the mix it flies off the rails. Pseudo-randomly-moving enemies, hazards that you can't see, doors that are almost indistinguishable from the backgrounds, a maze that can't be mapped—all of these things are so close to being viable elements of a video game, but the developer managed to find the factor that makes them enjoyable (or even just bearable) and remove it every time, either through a lack of talent or a misguided desire to make *Castle of Deceit* different from its contemporaries in the most aggravating ways possible." —VGJunk (retrovania-vgjunk.blogspot.com)

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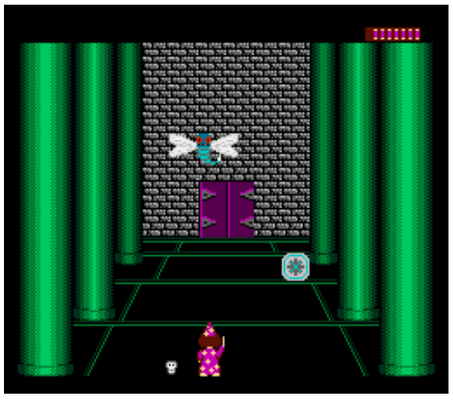
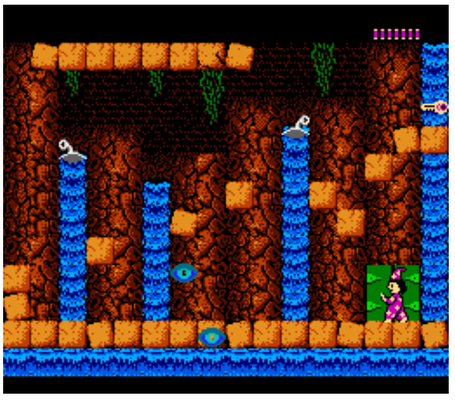




Castle of Dragon

PUBLISHER: Seta
DEVELOPER: Athena
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

The evil Darklarza's Dragon Cub has kidnapped the princess, and it is up to a brave warrior named Geraden to rescue her. As Geraden, players must walk through nicely rendered castles, forests, and caverns, mindlessly hacking and slashing ghost knights, blooodbats, sphinxes, zombies, cyclopean beasts, and other enemies. Geraden begins with a basic sword and an ordinary shield (when he ducks his shield automatically rises), but he can acquire a throwing knife, a mace, a sonic sword, a lightning sword, armor, a crystal ball (which prevents Darklarza's resurrection), a dragon scale shield, and a dragon slayer. There's not really any platforming, but Geraden must jump across the occasional hazardous gap, which can be frustrating, since players are only given one life. The game looks good and is nicely animated, but level after level of predictable enemies, dull swordplay, and bland level design mar the action. On the plus side, *Castle of Dragon*'s musical score is surprisingly good. It's much more varied and exciting than the game itself. Loosely based on the obscure 1989 Seta arcade game, which had bigger characters, some platforming action, and a two-player simultaneous mode.

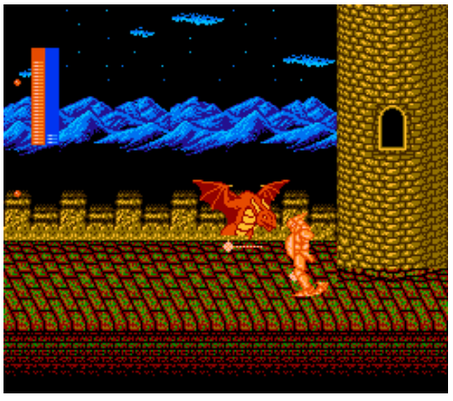
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

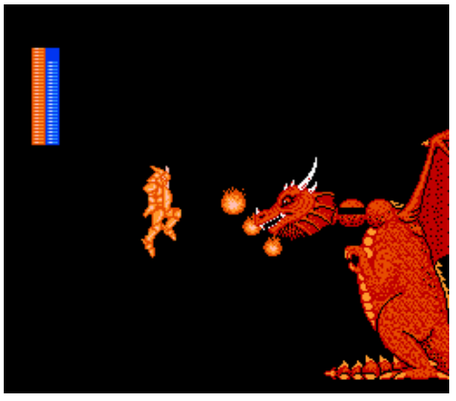
Notable Quotable:

"Only the daring knight has a life bar. Nobody else does, not even the bosses . . .terrible hit detection . . .leveling up takes forever . . .no life system or continues . . .you can revisit levels you've beaten but you're rewarded with nothing . . .graphically it didn't look too bad. The sprites look very detailed. The level backgrounds have some nice touches . . .the hall of mirrors level is probably one of the coolest looking graphics I've seen in an NES game . . . The music is a saving grace . . . The opening music fools you into thinking you're about to play a great game . . . The knives and the power-ups are the best thing about this game." —kNIGHTWING01 (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

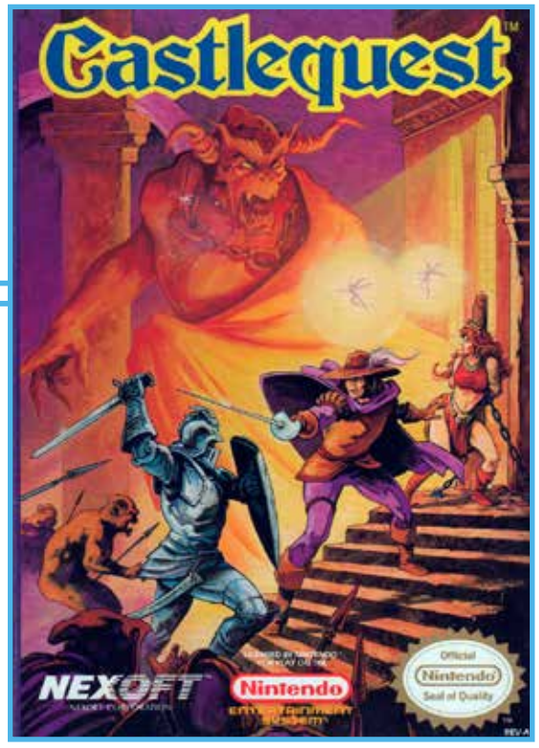
"It's barely the same game as the original as its level structure is entirely different, the way power-ups work are totally changed, and there are several new bosses. It's also a complete mess, arguably sloppier than the arcade version . . . It is considerably longer than the arcade version (though still only about half an hour in length), but more length does not always equate to more good. The movement is just a tad choppy and suffers massive slowdown if too many sprites clog the screen. Your sword does mediocre damage and you cannot regularly obtain powerups. You can only get new weapons by beating certain bosses, and though you get throwing knives, which are permanent until you pick up the mace (also permanent), the really cool fire and thunder swords are only temporary." —Michael Plasket (www.hardcoregaming101.net)





Castlequest

PUBLISHER: Nexoft
DEVELOPER: ASCII
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



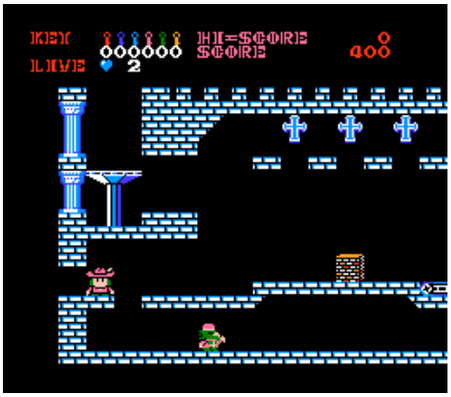
In *Castlequest* you control Prince Rafael, who must search 100 simplistic looking rooms (comprised largely of columns, brick walls and floors) to locate and rescue Princess Margarita, who has been captured by Mizer, the Dark Lord of Groken Castle. Each room has several color-coded doors. To open a door Rafael must use a key of the same color. Keys are limited in number (there are no extras) so discretion is advised. In addition to opening doors, Rafael will pick up treasures, ride elevators, jump over obstacles and on flying blocks, avoid needles, use items (barrels, blocks, bricks, jars, candles, and lockers), battle enemies (knights, wizards, attack cats, fire spirits, bishops, and phantom flowers) with a short-range sword, and more. A map enables Rafael to track his location and avoid searching the same room twice, but tricky puzzles and awkward controls make the game a challenge. The Japanese Famicom Disk System version, which was called *Castle Excellent*, had a save feature. Unfortunately, the NES game does not, so gamers are given 50 lives to compensate.

Notable Quotable:
"The basic idea is to find lots of different colored keys that will open lots of doors of the same color. But there are no extra keys! So which key for which door and in what order??? The action is slow, but the challenge in logic is among the greatest we've seen." —*Nintendo Power* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"This game has 100 rooms! And each one is, like, two screens long! That's 200 screens! And that's the game's main selling point. Hey, back in the day it didn't take much. But when you're constantly juggling a mental map of those rooms, as well as dealing with six different kinds of keys and—oh, yeah, lots of things trying to kill you—it can get to be kind of a bear . . .a prime example of one of those old-school puzzle action games that wants for a notebook full of graph paper, some colored pencils, and a whole lotta time." —CGRundertow (YouTube)

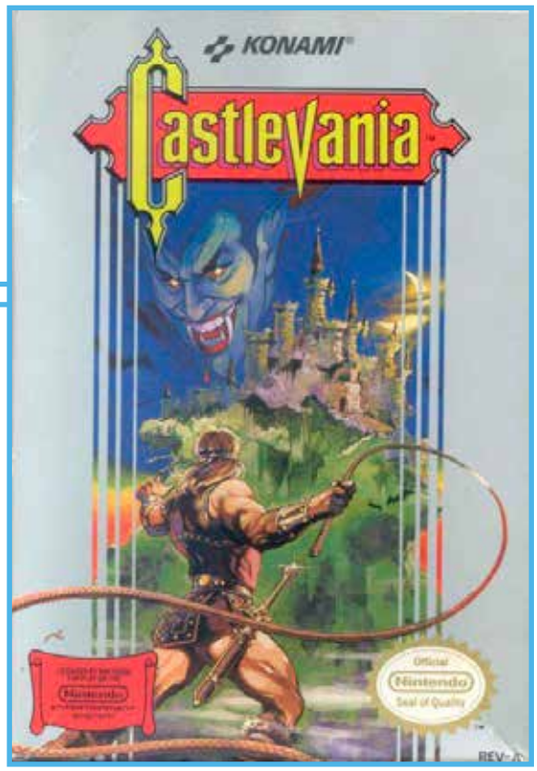
Notable Quotable:
"The mazelike aspect of the game alone can have you pulling your hair out. But each room also has many other ways to drive you crazy. You'll encounter numerous obstacles, conveyor belts, keys that are just out of your reach, deep pools of water, and deadly power beams. Then there are the wizards, bishops, and attack cats that also make your life miserable . . .requires a great deal of ingenuity, as well as the ability to think things through to logical conclusions . . .getting through *Castlequest* in a single sitting can be difficult and frustrating . . .a fascinating game—especially for those tired of shooting or slashing their way through the more action-oriented adventures." —*Game Players* (March 1990)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Castlevania

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1987



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

A true classic in the NES library, *Castlevania* is one of the best, most atmospheric games of the 8-bit era. Players, as Simon Belmont, must go up against none other than Count Dracula himself. Prior to that fateful encounter Belmont must climb stairs, jump over obstacles and onto platforms, and face hordes of other monster movie-like creatures, including vampire bats, phantom bats, zombies, floating Medusa heads, skeletons, hunchbacks, knights, the Frankenstein monster and Igor, and the Grim Reaper. Belmont is equipped with a fun-to-use magic whip and can grab the following weapons (carried one at a time) found in candles and bricks you destroy throughout the creepy, seven-story castle: daggers, axes, fire bombs, boomerangs, crosses (for destroying every enemy onscreen), invisibility potions, and morning stars (for increasing the power of the whip). Hearts act as special weapons ammo while pork chops can be eaten to revive lost health. Ornate graphics and spooky sounds match the game's awesome gameplay and inventive level design.

Memories: With its horror theme and rock-solid gameplay, *Castlevania* was an automatic purchase for me when it first came out. I love Universal Monsters, Hammer horror films, and straightforward action, so this game has always been one of my favorites. I even picked up the Game Boy Advance version—part of the Classic NES Series—so I could play it on the go. I was super disappointed with the more nonlinear *Castlevania II*, where I had to backtrack and go looking for stuff. Thankfully, *Castlevania III* got the series back on an action-oriented track.

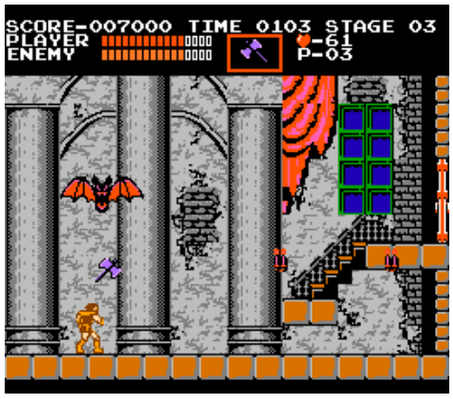
Notable Quotable:

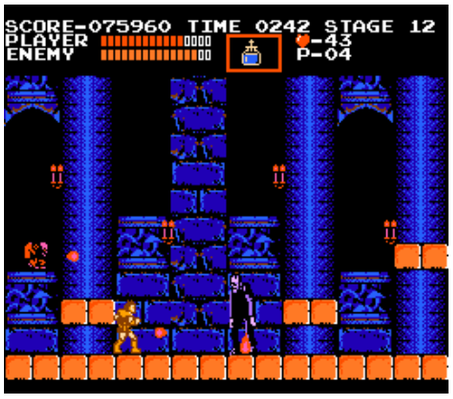
"A neat platform collecting game that keeps you coming back for more, *Castlevania* has all the touches that make a good arcade game. Sensibly, when you die the game allows you to start again at the beginning of the current level, rather than forcing you to hack all the way through again. Plenty of puzzling routes to learn—and there's a small strategic element involved in the collection of the extra weapons: you can only carry one, and it's important to have the appropriate add-on at the right time." —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (May 1989)

Notable Quotable:

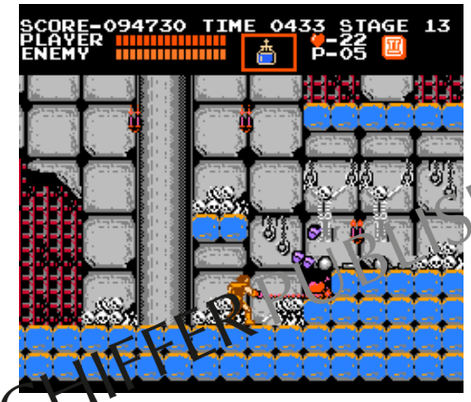
"*Castlevania* is more arcade-orientated than the MSX version [which was called *Vampire Killer*]; keys are no longer needed, and there are short-term objectives to reaching the next level. Unfortunately, infinite continue-plays are too generous, making progressing easier than it should be. Graphically, *Castlevania* is among the best Nintendo games, featuring constantly changing backdrops and many highly detailed sprites. Sonically, it is a real treat: music captures the mood of each level, getting ever more

Castlevania





spooky as you near the tomb of Dracula." —*The Games Machine* (March 1989)



Notable Quotable:

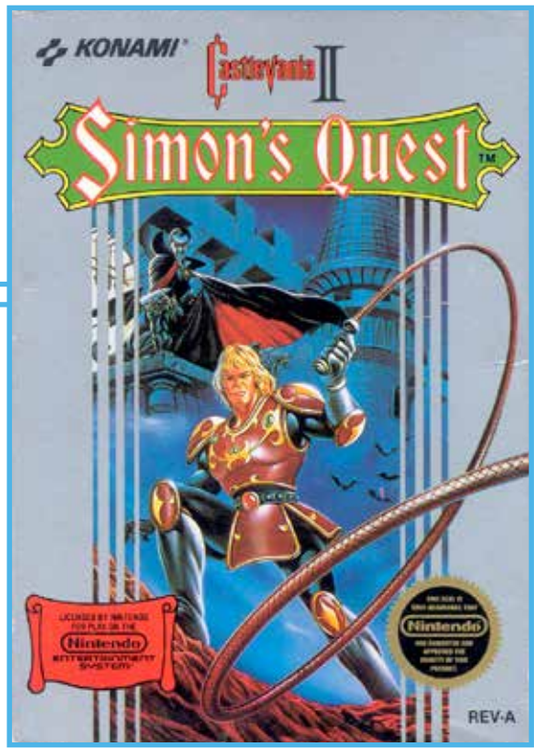
"*Castlevania* may be guilty of the cardinal platforming game sin of rigid jumping, but that stiffness is mostly accommodated for by smart level design that requires the player to respect dangerous leaps over pits as true hazards. *Castlevania* is a tough action game where monsters constantly come at you, and you must keep them at bay with an effective whip weapon and secondary items that add an extra layer to considering the deadlier battles with resilient hordes and big bosses. It would be better if you had greater control in the air, but Dracula's castle is just as much a threat as its inhabitants, making for a quick and action-packed journey with no lulls. Your relationship with the controls will be what cinches your enjoyment, but if you do acclimate to it, *Castlevania* will deliver on an easily re-playable and enjoyably challenging adventure." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Insider Insight: When I was a kid, we lived out in the country in Cottonwood, California, a small town that didn't offer many options in the form of electronic entertainment. When the rental store craze hit in the '80s we had two main stores that rented games. My father, who was typically not into doing anything new, decided it was time to rent one of the new "gameplayers." I was initially in shock over what he said, then quickly got ready to head to town, which was several miles away. We typically went into town to rent a movie, but I knew that one of the local rental stores was offering NES consoles for the weekend for $20. Our family walked in and one of the two NES systems was available for rent. At the time the selection of games was limited to about a dozen titles. My older brother thought that *Castlevania* looked cool and we agreed to take it home for the weekend. I had played many arcade and Atari 2600 games, but I had never played on a Nintendo system before, so I did not know exactly what to expect. After hooking up the console to our Magnavox TV my brother, surprisingly enough, allowed me the first game, and I was blown away by the graphics and sounds. It was like having an arcade machine in my house, but one that could play other games, too. I played *Castlevania* with my brother the entire weekend and was bummed when we had to return the console. Fortunately, my family got an NES a short time later, and this started my love for both the console and *Castlevania* games. —"The Immortal" John Hancock, YouTube personality

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Castlevania II: Simon's Quest

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1988

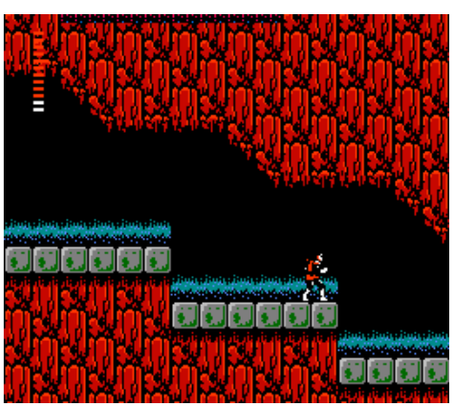


If you enjoyed the straightforward, largely linear action of the original *Castlevania*, you might find its first sequel a head scratcher. *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* once again finds the whip-wielding Simon Belmont battling classic monsters (two-headed creatures, man-eating plants, spiders, skulls, the Wolfman, the Mummy, and the like), but this time the gameplay has been infused with a number of adventure/RPG elements. These include talking to villagers to garner clues; purchasing magic weapons (daggers, silver knives, oak stakes, chain whips, flame whips, and the like); and searching for (and destroying) Dracula's missing pieces (nail, eyeball, rib bone, ring, and heart). The action, which requires backtracking, takes Belmont through six hauntingly beautiful levels: The Mansions, The Church, The Ferryman, The Forest Primevil, Bridge Over the River Die, and The Graveyard. Though the series would return to pure action with *Castlevania III* (a move most fans appreciated), *Castlevania II* was a precursor and predictor of sorts to the excellent *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (PlayStation), which many players cite as their favorite game in the series.

Memories: I received *Castlevania II* for Christmas in 1988. I was disappointed with the nonlinear layout and most of the other RPG elements added to the formula, but I was determined to enjoy my gift, so I played it late into the night. The game lulled me into a sleepy state, and I don't have a particularly good sense of direction anyway, but my RPG-loving brother-in-law was there beside me, telling me where to go and what to do as I controlled Simon Belmont. We didn't beat the game that night but we had fun trying.

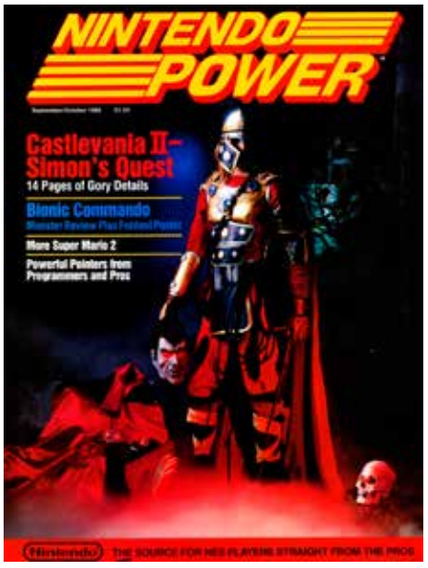
Notable Quotable:

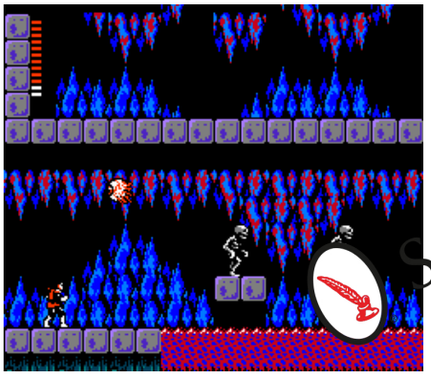
"In every series of video games, there's always that one title, that black sheep of the crowd . . . There's *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*, the only game of the Zelda series that contains a hard-hitting heavy dosage of side-scrolling . . . There's *Contra Force*, the most sluggish of the Contra games with practically no tie with the rest of the games . . . There's *Star Fox Adventures*, which opted to take a left turn in the space flight series for an action-adventure-seek-out-every-possible-collectible-item style game. And there's *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* . . . Is *Castlevania II* fun? Yes. But if you are simply looking for straightforward adventuring with no need for excessive thinking and clue finding, you're not going to be so amused with the game . . . Konami took a risk with its sequel, but certainly they did not do anything particularly harmful to the series . . .this title should not be overlooked, for it is indeed a classic." —Random Access (randomacc.net)

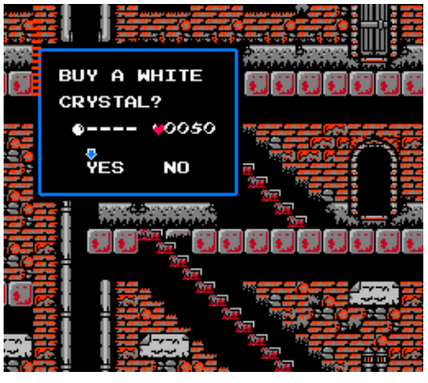


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Castlevania II: Simon's Quest







Insider Insight: This is an unpopular opinion, but *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* is my favorite NES game. The first time I saw an angry reviewer speak harshly about the game I was in disbelief. Was I wrong all these years? Was my beloved *Castlevania* game truly bad? As a kid, I was lucky to have a group of friends who talked video games, from secrets and codes, to tips on how to advance through a particularly challenging section, to general likes and dislikes of the medium. You know, gamer talk! There was also *Nintendo Power*, the Nintendo "Powerline" help hotline, and even some video game tips and tricks TV shows. Thanks to these I never got stuck trying to figure out how to make use of the game's more obscure elements and it allowed me to enjoy it to the fullest extent.

Simon's Quest was one of the early games that really laid out the foundations of the "Metroidvania" genre, along with its counterpart, *Metroid*. This genre name wouldn't be coined for years to come but has inspired many beloved games. With *Castlevania II* the gameplay is rock-solid, its atmosphere is spot-on, and it has a legendary soundtrack to support it—these aspects have stood the test of time. The obscure elements are near meme status today, but thanks to those early angry reviews and the power of the internet more people know about this game, and those cryptic instructions are but an internet search away from being answered. I love this game and its quirks! —Joshua L. Olson, aka Church—The Game Grinder on YouTube

Insider Insight: There's no doubt about why the *Castlevania* series is so popular. The mix of action, exploration, and classic monsters is a wonderful formula for great gaming and Konami was firing on all cylinders with its NES trilogy. *Simon's Quest* is my favorite—a title upon which many fans tend to frown. Personally I don't understand the hate. The game isn't perfect, but it gets a lot more right than it does wrong. The gameplay is solid, the graphics and sounds are excellent, and the map is diverse and fun to navigate. Some puzzles could have been less vague, such as the one with the infamous white orb, but the quest is long and engaging enough to play through in a decent amount of time. I admit that the final boss is perhaps the worst in gaming history, but overall *Simon's Quest* is a great and underrated entry in the *Castlevania* saga.

Not only is it my favorite, but *Simon's Quest* was my introduction to the series, attracting me with its gothic cover art one day while I was browsing the selections at the video rental store. As a fan of D&D's *Ravenloft* I was immediately struck by the artwork. I fell in love with the whip-slinging and jumping action, but I sadly only got as far as the white orb. Frustrated, I returned the game, but soon found the answer to my dilemma in an issue of *Nintendo Power*. Thus *Simon's Quest* became the first game I rented twice. I had saved my password, so I was able to continue right where I left off. Dracula went down that weekend and it was a great time. I still revisit the game every so often, making it a weekend event like I did back in high school when I first met Simon Belmont. It's as enjoyable now as it was then, regardless of what the haters say. —Ken Horowitz, administrator of Sega-16.com, author of *Playing at the Next Level: A History of American Sega Games* and *The Sega Arcade Revolution: A History in 62 Games*

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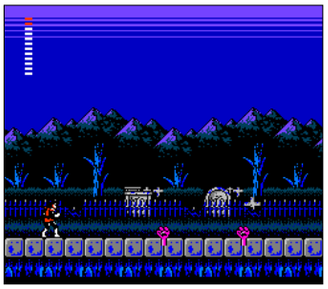
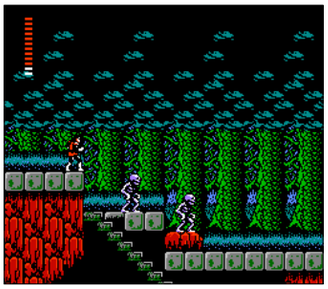
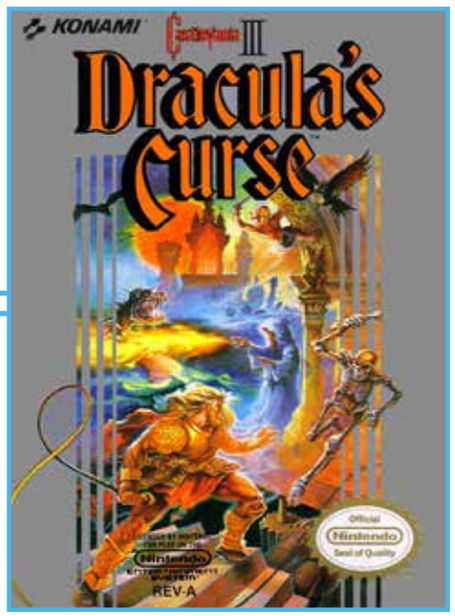




Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



My favorite game in the entire series, *Castlevania III* takes place 100 years prior to the original *Castlevania*, putting players in the role of Trevor Belmont, a forefather of Simon. The game looks and sounds even better than previous entries (check out the gorgeous stained glass windows and ivy growing up the castle walls in level one), and Trevor can transform into three different partner spirits: Alucard (Dracula's son, who can turn into a bat and fire a ball of destruction); Grant DaNasty (a pirate who can stick to walls and ceilings and wield an axe and a dagger); and Sypha Belnades (a mystic warlord who attacks with flames, frozen crystals, lightning bolts, and a staff). For battling the bats, skeleton dragons, Frankenstein's monster, and other enemies Trevor wields a whip (a trademark of the series) and can find and use battle axes, boomerangs, daggers, and sacred water. The action evokes the first *Castlevania*, as there's plenty of stair climbing, platforming jumping, and monster whipping, but this game features alternate pathways leading to four different endings. Levels, which are expertly designed, include Haunted Ship of Fools, Sunken City of Poltergeists, Clock Tower of Untimely Death, and Curse Castle, among 13 others.

Notable Quotable:

"Being a great fan of the series I was really surprised to find this is the best yet! Not only are the graphics, sound, and animation better, but the gameplay and scenery have to be seen to be believed." —*N-Force* (September 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"*Castlevania* may be an old concept, but in *Dracula's Curse* Konami has proven that they can still make it work. The new cast of characters widens the options and the graphics are some of the best the NES has or will ever see!"—*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1990)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: I fell in love with the *Castlevania* series after I watched some of my cousins play the first game not long after it was released. I thought the soundtrack was amazing and that the horror/gothic atmosphere was original and just overall cool looking. Fast forward to Christmas 1990 when I *finally* got my hands on the very first *Castlevania* game of my own: *Castlevania III*. As I popped the game in that morning it immediately felt both familiar and new. Seeing the graphical upgrades left my jaw on the floor, and the incredible soundtrack made me long to hear more.

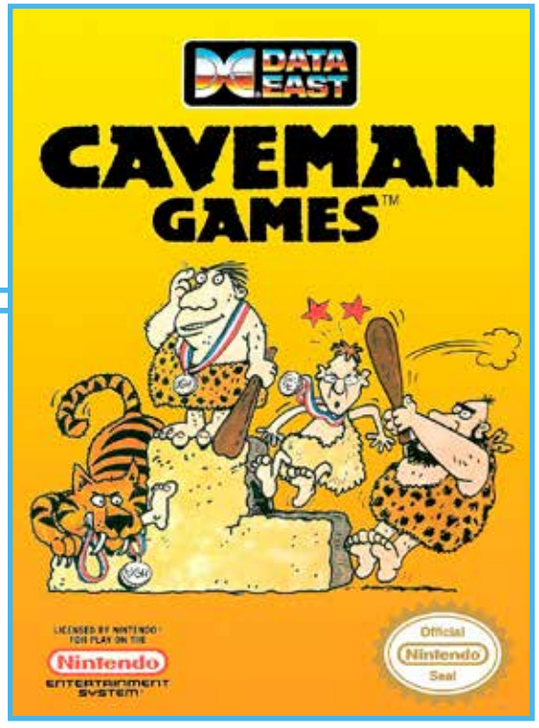
Knowing ahead of time that I could gain new allies to join me on my adventure (thanks *Game Players* and *Nintendo Power*) made me excited to see what these new characters had to offer in terms of gameplay and challenge. The impression the game left with me that first Christmas morning rushes back to me every time that I play the game, which is why it is one of my very favorite NES titles.—John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

Insider Insight: I enjoyed the original *Castlevania* games when they were new, but they never stuck with me because they were difficult. However, I sought out the classic games in the series after I played and deeply feel in love with the groundbreaking *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (PS1), which for me was around 2001. By that time tracking down vintage *Castlevania* games was no easy feat, as all our rental stores had gotten rid of their 8- and 16-bit games. During a break from school I got lucky in my quest for more opportunities to hunt Dracula.

One day, while looking for a game to rent in a convenience store, I spotted a shopping cart with cheap NES games for sale, one of which was *Castlevania III*. Fresh off of finishing *Symphony of the Night*, and with more years of experience playing video games, I was confident that I could finally make progress in *Dracula's Curse*, only to be humbly reminded how brutally tough the NES games were compared to those later titles that took inspiration from Nintendo's *Metroid*. Even though it thoroughly kicks my behind every time I play it, I adore *Dracula's Curse*. It's hard to get angry when you're playing such a well-designed game with one of the best soundtracks to ever grace the system.—Blair Farrell, owner of Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

Caveman Games

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Dynamix
GAME TYPE: Sports/Olympics, 1–4 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



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CAVEMAN GAMES
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Essentially the Olympics set in prehistoric times, *Caveman Games* gives players six nicely (and at times amusingly) rendered events in which to compete: Clu[illegible]face off against another player wieldi[illegible]ub); Mate Toss (throw a woman by the hair by whirling her around discus style—a game that seems more than a little sexist); Saber Race (outrun a hungry saber-toothed tiger); Fire Making (a race to start a fire with sticks); Dino Race (ride a dinosaur while jumping over rock hazards); and Dino Vault (jump over a hungry tyrannosaurus). Each of these events was included in the original 1988 computer title, *Caveman Ugh-Lympics*. The games offer a sideview perspective and most involve rapid button pushing, precision timing, or both, similar to *Track & Field*.

Notable Quotable:
"While I like where the designers were trying to take this game, as sort of a comical, prehistoric twist on the classic *Track & Field*, it never really gets up to speed. The execution is choppy and hurts the other positive features, like some interesting animation and sounds." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December1990)

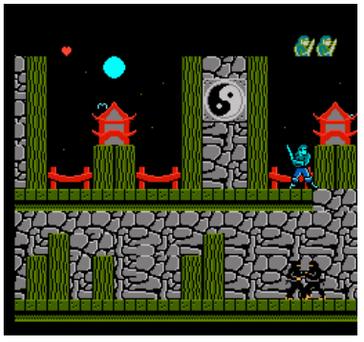
Notable Quotable:
"The designers of *Caveman Games* should have spent less time in devising a clever gimmick and more time making a game that was fun to play. Graphics and sound range from below average to terrible . . .not offer enough variety for any sort of prolonged play . . .inane simplicity and tedium . . .does a particularly bad job of attempting to make the games distinct from one another . . .all events move quite slowly and rarely end in dramatic finishes." —Zachary Knowlton (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight: Oh, what a silly concept this is—cavemen competing in Olympic-style events! I got this game from a neighbor kid when I was younger. At the time it was common for all the kids in my neighborhood to get together with the game cartridges they didn't play anymore for trading. I don't remember what I traded for it, but I felt like I walked away the clear winner when I brought *Caveman Games* home. This quickly became a family favorite with its silly sense of humor and bizarre takes on classic events. My mother's favorite was the event where you spin around and throw your wife by the hair to see how far she'll go—you should've heard the way she cackled at the sight! Though I still enjoy this one every once in a while, I don't think I'll ever be able to pole vault over that tyrannosaurus rex . . . —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Challenge of the Dragon

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



In *Challenge of the Dragon*, Sir Burkelot must battle his way through ten worlds: Village, Grasslands, Big Wall, Master Ninja, Rocky Haven, Forest, Wizard's [illegible], Outer Castle, Graveyard, and Inner C[illegible]. A master of kung fu, Burkelot can run, superkick, jump, flip, and pull off five different attacks: sword, knee to the chest, side kick, flying dragon kick, and shoulder butt. He can also throw magic black potion at the various knights, dragons, lizardmen, valkyries, ninjas, giants, and other enemies he will encounter. Pink potion provides Burkleot with health while green potion gives you an extra man. Pressing A makes Burkelot jump while B is a random attack. According to the manual, the randomness is due to Burkelot choosing the appropriate attack based on his distance to the enemy. His goal is to rescue his girlfriend, Lady Ninja, who was captured by the evil Demiwind. Weak weapons, subpar graphics, and limp gameplay make this game an easy one to skip. Unlicensed and rare.

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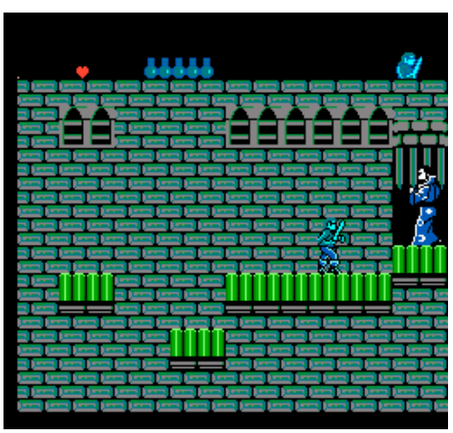
Notable Quotable:

"The farther I got the weirder the enemies, and the more I wanted to see what the game would provide for a punching bag . . . A shoddily developed beat-'em-up experience that leaves you wondering why you care as you continue to move forward. I can't really recommend the game, as it is awful, but I can say that the game intrigued me, even as it repulsed me. That's got to be worth something." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

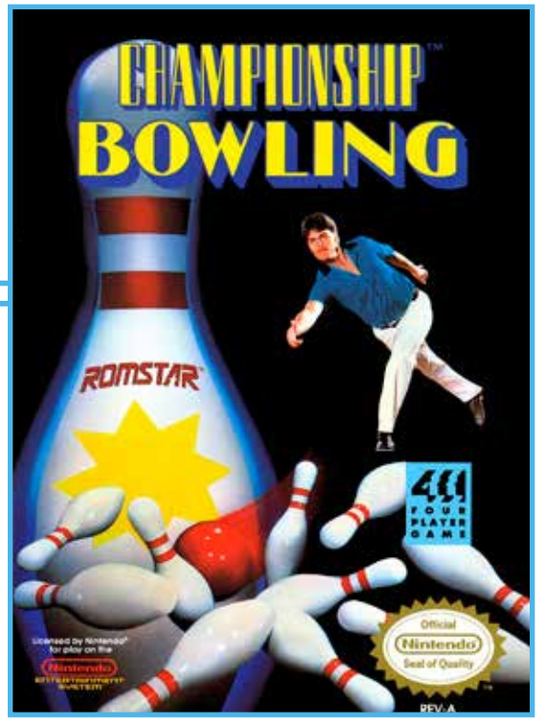
Notable Quotable:

"The first couple of stages, while not impressive, were actually sort of tolerable. Life refills were fairly common and none of the enemies were overly troublesome . . .showed Color Dreams could create somewhat competent opening stages to introduce players to their particular style of brawler . . . flailing about with a tiny sword, tapping foes with your foot and executing an amazingly awkward jumping kick . . . In the fourth stage, you fight NOTHING but bomb-throwing ninjas . . .difficult, but in all the wrong ways. Anyone can make a game tough by simply handicapping players with poor gameplay." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)



Championship Bowling

PUBLISHER: Romstar
DEVELOPER: Athena
GAME TYPE: Sports/Bowling, 1–4 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989



Championship Bowling was the only bowling title released for the NES. The game offers a diverse selection of four characters of seemingly similar abilities, each of whom the player must name: a blonde Caucasian male (the only left-hander in the bunch); an African-American male; an Asian male; and a red-headed Caucasian female. The action, which is viewed from behind and a little above the bowler, lets players select ball weight (7, 9, 11, 13, or 15 pounds), position the bowler left and right, and set the power (via a fast-moving meter) and curve of the ball. A strip along the right side of the screen gives an overhead view of the lane and pins. The music is decidedly hyper, infusing dramatic punch into an already fun game. Curiously, a four-player adapter is required for three- and four-player games, despite the alternating nature of the gameplay. Romstar also released *Championship Bowling* in the arcades in 1989, but it's quite a bit different.

Memories: During my senior year in high school, I took bowling first period because I figured it would be an easy class, and it was. What I didn't realize is that I would grow to love the sport and get pretty good at it. During the playoffs that year the school bowling team was a player short, so they asked me to fill in. I gladly accepted and we won the championship. *Championship Bowling* for the NES is a solid rendition of the sport, but I've spent most of my video bowling time with the game of the same name for the Genesis and with the bowling option on *Wii Sports*.

Notable Quotable:
"A basic rendition of the sport littered with unnecessary flaws. There are four characters and a variety of ball weights to choose from, but the difference between them is little more than cosmetic. With only a limited amount of hand-eye coordination a player should easily be able to master a steady throw, but the consistency of the results doesn't seem to mirror the consistency of the throw. Strikes are a rarity, and splits are far more commonplace than in real bowling." —Jeff Irwin (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The controls are pretty decent, and once you get the hang of the ball weight, control, and power you'll be flinging strikes at a pretty consistent rate. In fact, I think I found some spot right between the two last dots where you can spin it and almost ALWAYS get a strike. There seem to always be tricks like that in old sport games. Visually I was expecting a lot less from a bowling game, but it looks good! And the music, wow—I've never been so pumped up to bowl." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

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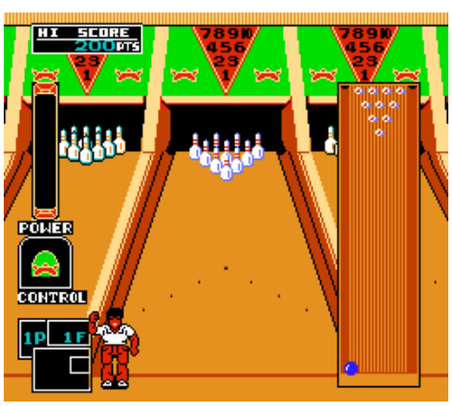
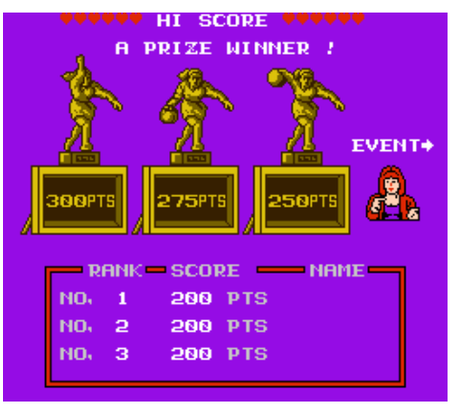
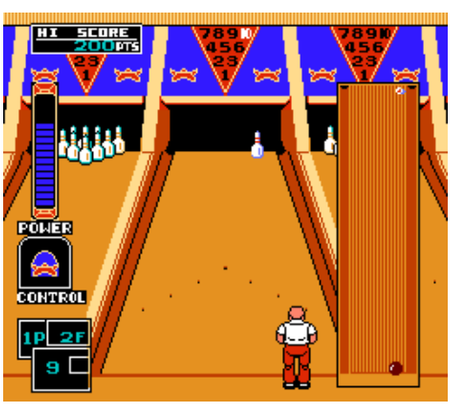
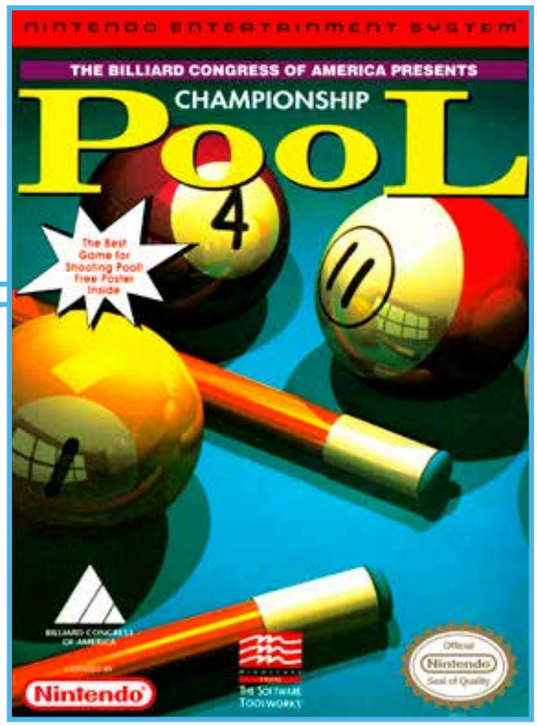






Championship Pool

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Bitmasters
GAME TYPE: Sports/Billiards, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993



Like many of the old Intellivision sports titles and board games, *Championship Pool* was endorsed by a governing body, in this case the Billiard Congress of America. The action is viewed from overhead, with players using a cursor to aim shots and a power meter (which appears along with the cue in a pop-up window) to facilitate how hard to hit the ball. Prior to taking a shot, players can get a preview (via a phantom ball) of approximately where the hit ball will land if the player proceeds to take that shot. Players can also set spin on the ball, move the camera around the table, zoom the camera in and out, view replays, and select from four different modes: Tournament (8-ball and 9-ball World Championship); Challenge (practice); Party (up to eight players); and Freestyle (trick shots, make up new rules). Game types include 14.1 Continuous Rotation, Fifteen Ball, Straight Pool, Equal Offense, and Speed Pool. *Championship Pool* is a fine game for the 8-bit workhorse, but the Genesis and SNES versions offer angled close-ups and richer graphics and sounds.

Memories: We never owned a pool table, but I got pretty good at the sport while growing up by going to pool halls and playing at various friends' houses—usually in their garage (game rooms in homes weren't nearly as common decades ago as they are now). I far prefer real pool to video billiards, as I just don't find much pleasure in lining up, aiming, and executing shots with the control pad.

Notable Quotable:
"The table looks gigantic in comparison to the balls . . . The aiming system is the best of any pool game I've seen . . .you'll make more shots here than on any other pool game . . . There's plenty to do and you won't get bored." —GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The game may offer a lot of variations, but damn this is one of the ugliest pool simulators I have ever played . . . The graphics come across as being something pulled straight from an Atari 2600 . . .the music is good but it does NOT fit the pool atmosphere. It feels like I'm listening to *California Games* music while playing pool. Maybe it's supposed to simulate the crappy music that's playing from a jukebox while you're in some random pool hall. The only thing this game has going for it is the ability to zoom in and out and really measure up your shots. But this turns the game into a physics/math lesson, and I really don't feel like figuring that crap out while I'm playing an NES game." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

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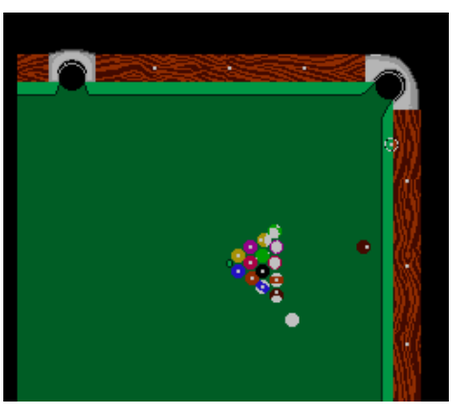
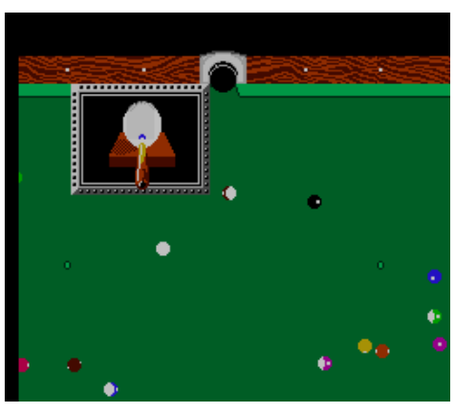




Cheetahmen II

PUBLISHER: Active Enterprises
DEVELOPER: Active Enterprises
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1997 (after being planned for release in 1993)

The sequel to *Cheetahmen*, which only appeared on the multi-game cartridge *Action 52*, *Cheetahmen II* was never released officially thanks to financial and distribution problems suffered by Active Enterprises; 1,500 copies of the game were originally produced prior to the downfall of Active. Around 1997, NES collector and video game store owner Mike Etler discovered the cartridges and boxes—which were still separate—in an Active Enterprises warehouse. He put the carts in the boxes, shrink-wrapped them, and sold them for $10 each. In the game, players guide an anthropomorphic cheetah as he walks, jumps on platforms (including gray squares suspended in the air), and leaps across gaps and over simpleminded dogs, birds, and snakes. Armed with a crossbow, the cheetah also shoots swordsmen (whose bodies are invisible), tornadoes, and other enemies among such simplistic imagery as grass, posts, and skulls. The cheetah cannot duck, so lower enemies can't be shot. The programming is obviously unfinished, as it gives players just four of a proposed six levels (the game crashes at the end of level four). Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

"It's amazing that every aspect of this game sucks so badly. Usually there is something in each game I review that I like even the least bit, whether it be music, a character, or even an item or something . . .this hideous thing has nothing. It has MS Paint-ish graphics and annoying music . . . All you can do is move left and right and shoot some lame-ass arrows and do a few jumps. That's it." —Twilight Foundry (twilightfoundry.com)

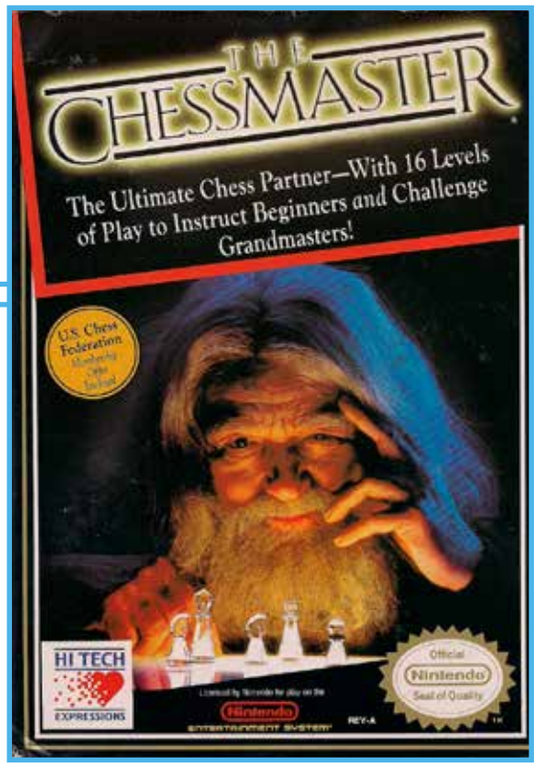
Notable Quotable:

"A broken and incomplete game. You can't pass the second level without cheating. There are two good things about this game: the music and the fact that its awfulness leads one to imagine ridiculous but entertaining contexts under which the game was developed . . .the controls are not responsive in the least and the gameplay fails to do anything correctly, despite consisting of only the most rudimentary gameplay elements . . . The main problems are that you can't duck and you can't aim . . .the Cheetahman you control has four frames of animation: two for walking and two for shooting his cheetah crossbow. Sometimes the shooting animation doesn't happen and the little black arrows just shoot from his chest. The graphics are notably horrible for an NES game made in 1992 and slowdown occurs frequently. There are glitches all over the place." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Chessmaster

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990


THE CHESSMASTER
The Ultimate Chess Partner—With 16 Levels of Play to Instruct Beginners and Challenge Grandmasters!
U.S. Chess Federation
HI TECH EXPRESSIONS
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality

Featuring crisp, clear visuals and classic-style game pieces, *The Chessmaster* is a classy, nicely programmed port of the popular computer chess series that began in 1986 with *The Chessmaster 2000*. You can challenge a friend or play against the Chessmaster himself in this game, which features regulation rules. Or you can simply watch the Chessmaster play both sides of the board. At any time during a match you can switch sides with the Chessmaster and assume control of his pieces (and vice versa). Other options and features include forcing the Chessmaster to move, taking back and replaying pieces, setting up the board as desired, making the Chessmaster solve for a forced mate, and more. There are 16 difficulty levels, giving gamers of most any skill level a good mental workout. The jazz classic "Take Five" plays during the title screen.

Memories: Of all the board games adapted to the video format, I think chess makes the most sense. It's fun matching wits with the computer, and you can play again and again to hone your skills for the next time you play a human opponent. Chess is a complex game, requiring you to think several moves ahead to get good, and simulated versions such as this are great for practice. Most of my time playing *The Chessmaster* was via the Game Gear, though, since I could take it on the go—it's the perfect car game.

Notable Quotable:

"An elegant translation of the PC game that thankfully isn't dumbed down for a console audience . . .will satisfy both beginners and experts . . . The visuals are clean, with a crisply rendered chessboard and polished, classically styled pieces. A brief musical fanfare plays after each move." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Compared to *Battle Chess*, the one and only other chess simulator I've played both on NES and Windows 95, *The Chessmaster* is leagues above its competition. If you're learning chess or you want to learn chess, but you don't have any friends who would be willing to play with you (all too common these days, I'm afraid), you can do worse than to pick up a used copy of *Chessmaster*. It entertains your mind and your soul. How many old Nintendo games can do that?!" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"*Chessmaster* falls somewhere under *Magic Darts* in terms of unnecessary NES games. If you are a fan of the board game, you probably prefer playing it on a real board with a human opponent. If you enjoy playing against artificial intelligence, your computer will easily offer a better program with a quick search. The astounding array of difficulty levels and options is a nice touch . . .a pleasant, powerful chess simulator, but does not belong too high on the NES library totem pole." —NintendoLegend (nintendolegend.com)

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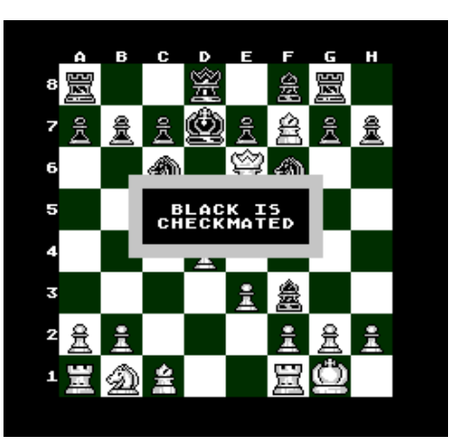
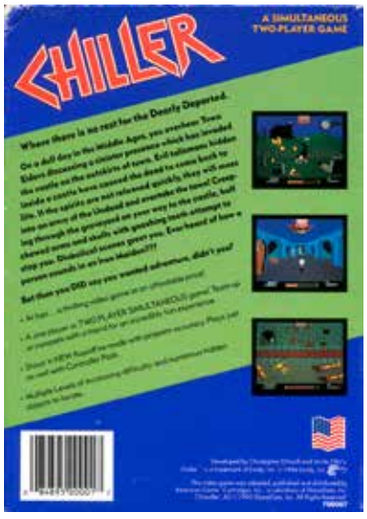


Chiller

PUBLISHER: American Game Cartridges
DEVELOPER: American Game Cartridges
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



Well, here's a novelty—an NES game with gore and sadistic violence. Based on the 1986 Exidy arcade game, which was ou[illegible] with a mounted gun controller, this f[illegible]son light gun shooter was not licensed by Nintendo, probably due to its extreme (for the system) content (though there were a few changes made, such as the removal of the graveyard nudity and the absence of the plethora of body parts lying about the torture chamber floor). Using the Zapper light gun or the standard control pad, you shoot ghouls, ghosts, body parts, skulls, zombies, and the like (including humans). You also fire at eight hidden targets called talismans in each stage that cause the dead to come back to life. After you locate and shoot all 32 talismans you advance to a bonus stage. Set in the Middle Ages, the game is chock full of horror imagery (and voice samples), including a graveyard, a haunted house, and a rack room—you can shoot torture devices to activate them. A cult classic that is hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

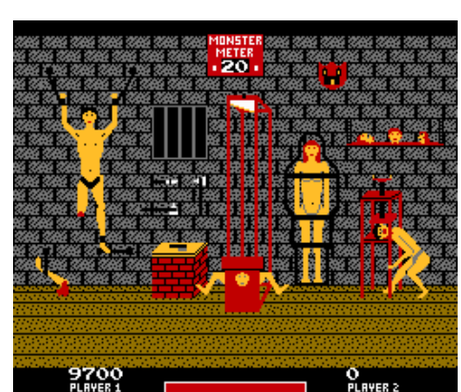
"*Chiller* was a mild success in arcades, and it later received an unlicensed port to the Nintendo Entertainment . . . That version actually added a scant bit of world building to the title screen, telling us that the people we're slaughtering in these halls are evil spirits who deserve their condemnation." —Luke Winkie (kotaku.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It's a pretty faithful port, with the biggest change in gameplay that the levels are now played in reverse order. You can also play with the Nintendo Zapper, which is slightly more comfortable to use than trying to control the fiddly cursor with the controller . . .has a lot less blood, although that's more than likely due to technical limitations than any sort of censorship. The torture chamber doesn't have piles of limbs on the ground, for example, and the guy who gets his head chopped off in the torture chamber doesn't bleed, but you're free to shoot the victims to pieces, just like the arcade version." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101)

Notable Quotable:

"The constant battle between racking up as much damage as possible to pass the level and exploring to find the hidden talisman is an interesting mechanic, but it quickly gets old. The gameplay is incredibly dull, and once you've got past the initial shock factor there's very little of note . . .the excessive screen flicker is very off-putting. At least it makes the location of the talismans easier to find, as they stay solid white while the screen jumps! You can use a normal controller if you want, but dragging the cursor around is slow and makes the game much harder. The only music in the game consists of eight notes repeated in a truly awful melody!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)



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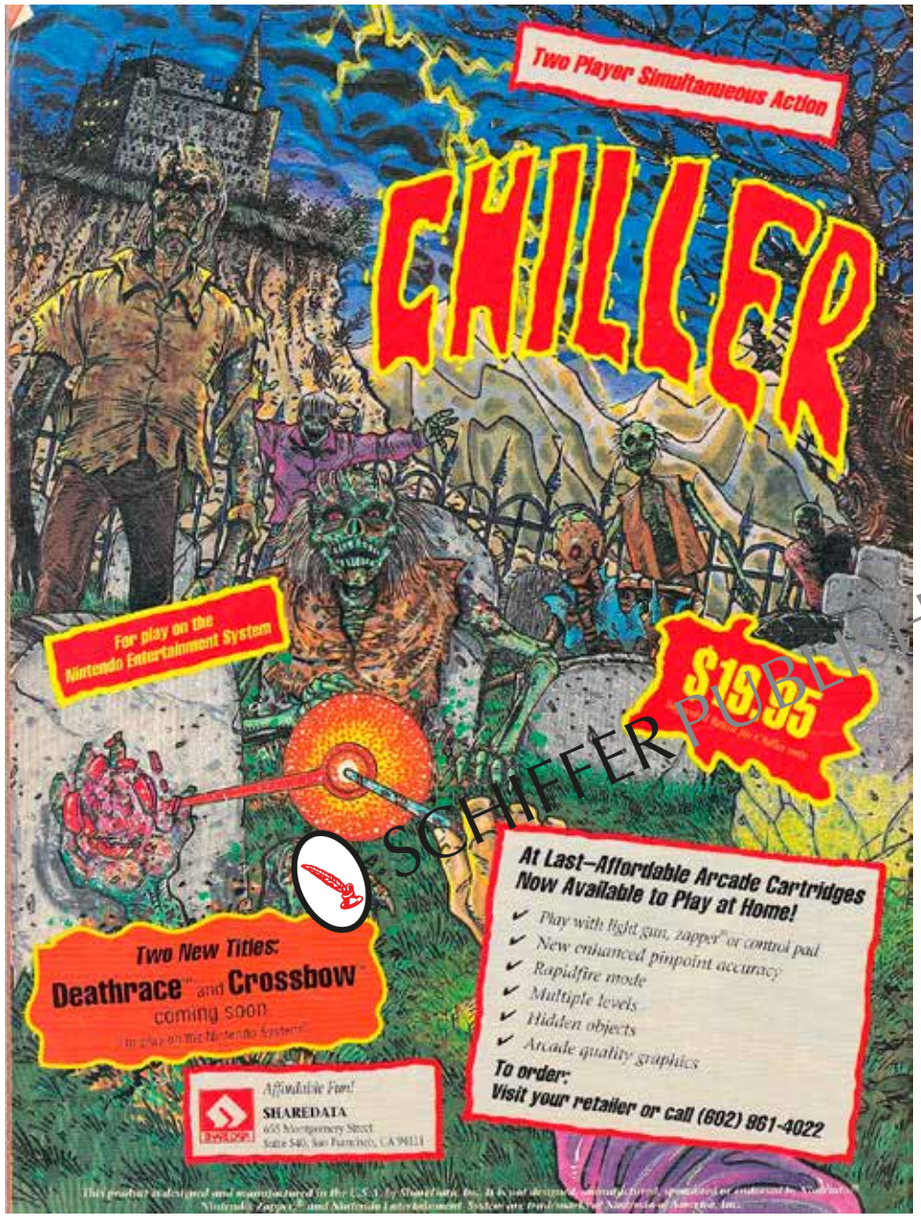

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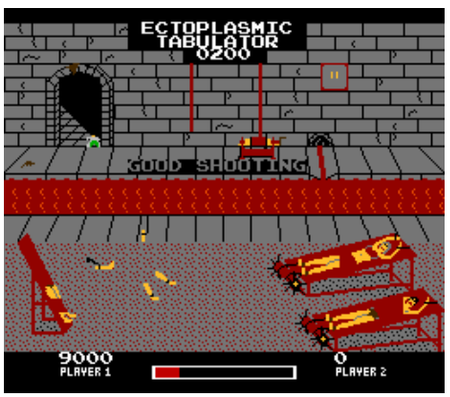

Insider Insight: The NES rarely associated with blood, gore, and imagery that is deemed too graphic for family viewing. However, *Chiller* is one of those titles that shocked the system, featuring some of the most grotesque imagery for the NES. It doesn't have the best graphics for the console, but it does hold a special niche for being a gruesome game. The other reason this game stands out to me is that it is actually a MULTI-PLAYER Zapper game! —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

Insider Insight: The Nintendo Entertainment System had its share of weird and unlicensed games, but Exidy's *Chiller* is the weirdest and the coolest. Released four years after it was essentially banned in American arcades by owners fearful of the game's violence, blood, and gore, the NES version is still a blast. Make no mistake, this is not *Duck Hunt*. Of course it's not the deepest game created on the console, either. That has to do with a series of changes made to get the game to work well on the NES. The biggest changes include removing mangled body parts from the game's torture chamber level and the taking out of some nifty visual effects the NES couldn't handle. *Chiller*'s story was also modified (all the "victims" in the game are now undead monsters), and the overall watering down, compared to the original, definitely hurt its overall appeal on the NES. In spite of that, there's not another light gun shooter like it on the console. As a result it's the sort of blast from the past time piece that belongs in any major collector's man cave.

I was always "aware" of *Chiller*, seeing it as that mega over-priced game in the retro game store. While working on my *Minds Behind Shooter Games* book, I finally got to play it on both the NES and arcade ROM. Impressed isn't the word. Visually, it's realistic enough to literally send chills down your spine, but the sound effects, actually recorded by Exidy employees, are enough to terrify anyone. My two-year-old watched me play on my Mac and was mimicking the screams for a week. Not exactly the sound you want to hear through the baby monitor at 3 a.m. —Patrick Hickey Jr, author of *The Minds Behind the Games* book series

Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

Like *DuckTales*, *Rescue Rangers* is a quality Capcom game based on a Disney cartoon. Players guide either Chip or Dale on a mission to thwart Fat Cat and his nefarious plans to overthrow the city. This entails running, jumping, and throwing crates (which you can also hide in), bombs, and even the occasional at such enemies as Racquet Rodent (lobs tennis balls), Rhino Runner (charges at you), Hawk Bomber (drops explosive charges), Popper Mouse (wields party favors), killer bees, mechanical bulldogs, and robotic rats. Thankfully, friends are also onboard: Gadget leaves clues and inventions; Monterey Jack helps in finding secret doors and pathways; and Zipper makes the titular squirrel duo invincible. Also helpful are stars and flowers (to collect for 1ups), acorns (for health hearts), and steel boxes (for stacking on top of each other to reach higher places). Varied locations you'll work your way through include a kitchen, up in trees, a library, a toy store, and a casino. *Rescue Rangers* is a tad easy (which is actually a nice change of pace from so many hardcore NES games), but the visuals and theme mimic the cartoon nicely.

Notable Quotable:

"There's no denying that with good presentation, a tested formula works. Unfortunately, that's where this offering falls down. Bad collision detection makes what should have been a visual feast a bit of an eyesore." —*N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Rescue Rangers* is another successful merger between Capcom and Disney. The game really provides us with a whole new technique to master within the framework of a standard action/adventure game. You get dual scrolling, large bosses, and super 2-player interaction!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Although it hardly pushes back the boundaries of console gaming, *Rescue Rangers* is tough and enjoyable. The action is fast and furious and there's a huge playing area to explore. The idea of incorporating simple puzzles into the game is a good one, and while they're hardly taxing, they help add variety to an otherwise pure platform game. The graphics and sound are of the usual Capcom high quality, particularly the sprites, which although small feature nice detail and animation. If you're a platform game fan this is well worth checking out." —*Mean Machines* (February 1992)

Insider Insight: When I was around eight years old, my parents would hire a babysitter for me when they would have to leave the house. My babysitter was just a little older than me and she had a bunch of NES games and would bring some over. That's when I played *Chip 'n Dale* for the first time. I begged her to let me borrow it so I could play it all the time. I enjoyed everything about it, from the platforming, to the power-ups, to the fact you can pick either Chip or Dale (I always chose Chip). The game had everything a child could ask for and it was the only NES title I could beat. I completed it in front of my babysitter one day and she was quite impressed. —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and Blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

Insider Insight: The NES at our house was something I had to share with my older brother. When we rented a game we had to decide on something that we would both enjoy, and in the rare circumstances we got to add a new game to our collection we had to share those as well. One game I got to call my own was *Chip n' Dale Rescue Rangers*. I adored the cartoon the game was based on, and I remember asking for and getting a Chip n' Dale stuffed toy two-pack that I saw at Zellers (a now-defunct Canadian department store) for Christmas that I took with me absolutely everywhere. Just like my cherished stuffed toys I loved *Rescue Rangers* on the NES, not just because it was "my" game, or that it played the show's theme when you booted up the cart, but because it offered just the right amount of challenge.

I spent a lot of time with our NES, but I can't say I was particularly good at many games, nor finished them without the help of the Game Genie cheat device. *Rescue Rangers* was a game that I actually finished, as it was just as hard as it needed to be for the audience it was intended for. While the game was mine, it was still fun to play with my brother in the two-player co-op mode, where you stunned one another with projectiles and then picked up the other player to throw them at enemies or into bottomless pits. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

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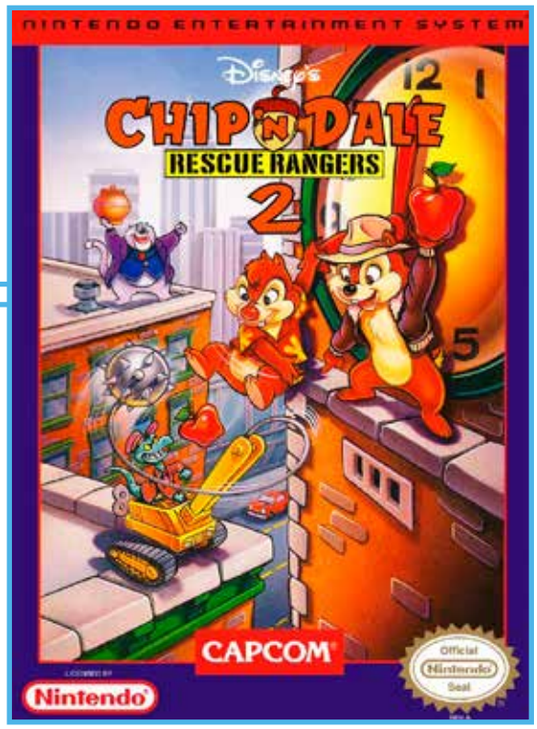
Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers 2

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1994



Fat Cat has escaped and stolen the Urn of the Pharaoh, and the famous duo of the title must capture the nefarious feline and his gang. *Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers 2* features the same type of cute, entertaining, two-player platforming action as its progenitor, but with a number of improvements, including better graphics, more of a storyline (with narrative cutscenes) and the ability to throw crates diagonally. As in the first game crates are also used for hiding in. Chip and Dale can pick up stunned enemies this time around, and Gadget, Monterey Jack, and Zipper make return appearances, though in altered roles (Monterey gives out donuts, for example). Activities include throwing apples, crates, and other items at enemies, battling a boss inside a dishwasher, working your way through a giant refrigerator, battling pirate weasels and magic cats, picking up and throwing your partner at enemies (in two-player mode one gamer controls Chip while the other guides Dale), diffusing bombs in a restaurant, and more. For health hearts you can grab acorns, ranger badges, and ranger plaques. Environments to run and jump through include a kitchen, a sewer, a ship, a haunted warehouse, a clock tower, and more. At the end of the game you'll face off against Fat Cat in an amusement park.

Notable Quotable:
"All you'd expect from a Capcom/Disney collaboration—great mystery solving plot, top graphics, and it's easy to control. The gameplay's simple but hard bosses compensate." —*Game Players* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"For an 8-bit platform, *Rescue Rangers 2* comes off rather well and, if anything, makes you wish for a 16-bit version. Capcom has always done well with cartoony characters and themes and this is certainly no exception." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Stands among the higher-quality titles at the end of the NES's life . . . While the platforming is a blast, cheap deaths are made possible courtesy of the game's one-way vertical scrolling . . .captures the essence of the first title while adding enough elements to keep the series fresh and interesting." —*Video Game Collector* #10 (Summer 2008)

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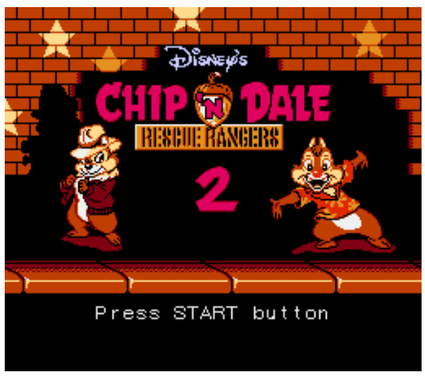
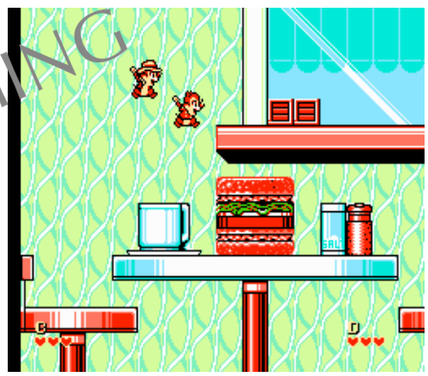
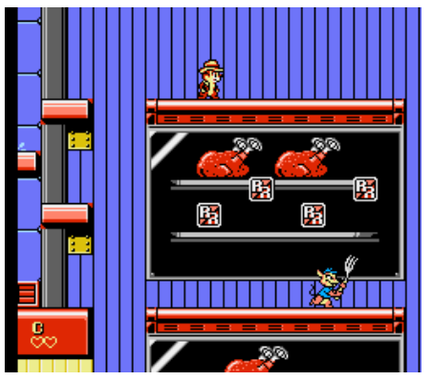
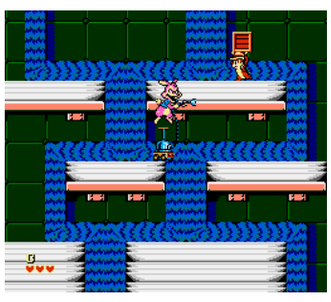


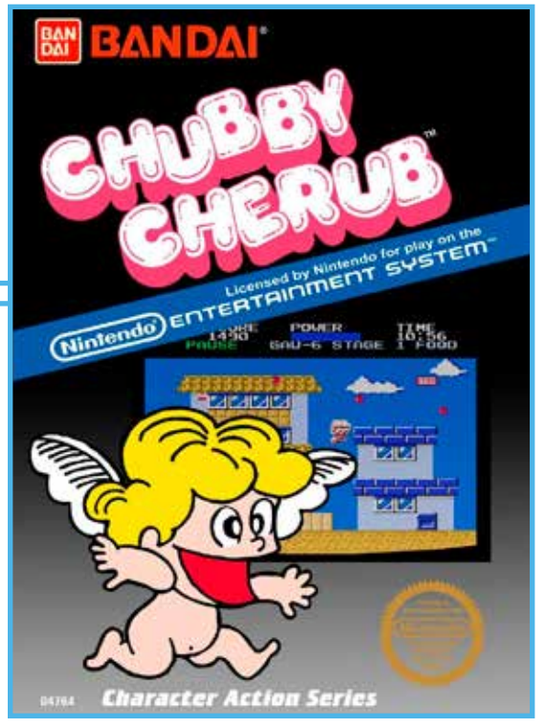






Chubby Cherub

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Tose
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986



If you've ever wanted to portray a naked character in a video game *Chubby Cherub* is for you. You guide the cherubic a[illegible] of the title as he walks (on roofs of ho[illegible]alls, and the ground), jumps, and flies (i[illegible]gary method of transport) through cute, colorful, nicely drawn worlds, each containing biting dogs, egg-throwing crows, and puffs of smoke. There's even a burglar who throws firecrackers at our hapless hero. To scare the dogs and make them run away Chubby Cherub can emit heart symbols with his "gau-gau" cannon. There are cats, but they are immune to your attacks. To maintain his strength throughout each level Chubby must continually consume apples, grapes, shish kabobs, hamburgers, and cakes. Eating a P symbol makes Chubby temporarily invisible and invincible. Mission objectives include delivering a microcomputer, giving a flower to the Mad Man, and discovering a clue that will help Chubby find his friend. *Chubby Cherub* is charming (or sickly sweet, depending on your perspective), but a bit lacking in the action department. Based on the Japanese manga character Q-tarō the Ghost, but the protagonist was changed to a cherub for North American release.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

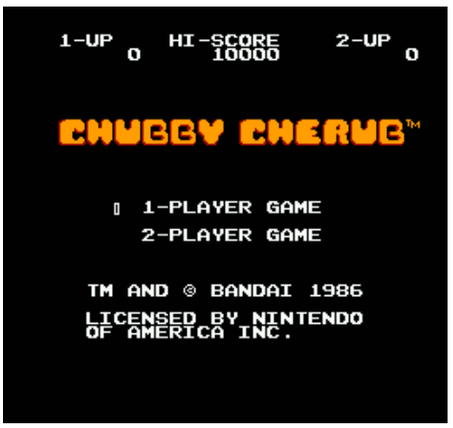
Notable Quotable:
"Badly translated English and super-annoying gameplay . . .all the levels are the same." —Something Awful (www.somethingawful.com)

Notable Quotable:
"This cartridge is a waste of plastic . . . I don't know how a flying fat baby isn't fun, but trust me, it isn't." —Sean Baby (www.seanbaby.com)

Notable Quotable:
"A very fun game of the 'cute' variety, in the spirit of *Rainbow Islands*, *Balloon Fight*, *Clu Clu Land*, *Mappy Land*, *Adventure Island* . . .this lighthearted, sugary game is fun for all ages and represents NES fun at, if not its BEST, close to its best." —Wonderland of Awesome (wonderlandofawesome.blogspot.com)

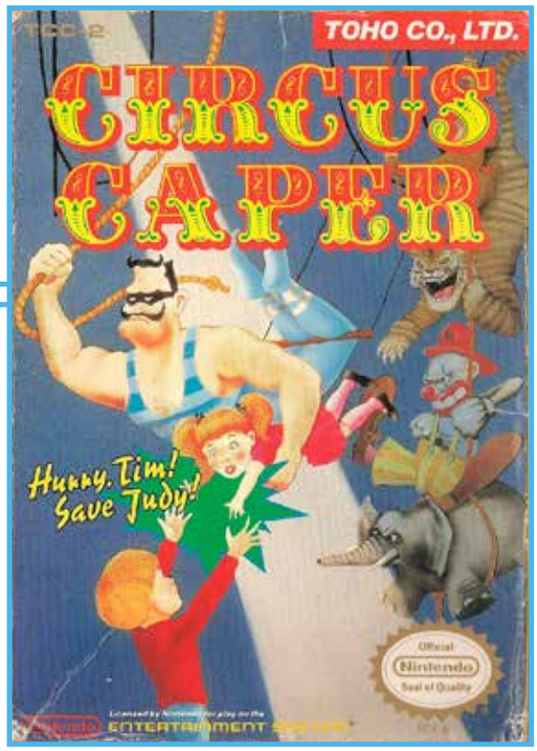
Notable Quotable:
"While *Chubby Cherub* is a simple early NES game that will provide a couple hours of enjoyment at most, I still recommend that purveyors of all things quirky and Japanese give it a play. If nothing else, it shows the creativity and downright strange ideas that Japanese developers had in the early days of the NES." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:
"Delightful . . .tremendously appealing to children (we tried it on a few who loved it). However, it also offers enough challenge and variety to interest older players, so long as they can be open to the child within and not let themselves be put off by the cuteness of the game . . .a little easier than some others for the system, at least in the earlier stages . . . Colorful graphics, cute characters, good music, and engaging gameplay make this one a nice change of pace from the shooting and strategy games." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1986)



Circus Caper

PUBLISHER: Toho
DEVELOPER: Advance Communication
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



In *Circus Caper* you play as Tim, a fan of the "Greatest Show on Earth." One day, while you and your sister are trying to get tickets to the circus, Mr. Magic kidnaps your sister and takes her deep within the confines of the circus tent. Moving primarily from right to left, you must run, jump, hit, kick, and even fly your way through six stages of circus mayhem to rescue your sister. As you progress through the game, you must get past or beat up flying human rockets, monkeys, upside down clowns, vultures, a tight rope walker, elephants, an animal trainer, a white tiger, a snake, a ghost, and other sideshow creatures bent on your destruction. Eventually you must face Mr. Magic himself. To give you an advantage over the evil circus performers and their trained animals you can pick up weapons, such as hammers, soccer balls, yo-yos, and bombs. In addition, there are blocks for use in reaching high areas and snapping alligator heads to hop on to cross water. Bonus points are earned via a fire-jumping mini-game. Despite oddly sinister circus music and unusually high jumps (by the protagonist and by certain enemies) *Circus Caper* is a largely typical side-scroller.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics here are simple, even by the NES standards. For a lot of the game's enemies it's hard to tell exactly what they are . . . The backgrounds tend to be very generic . . .a very small, and highly repetitive collection of music . . . None of the music here is particularly memorable or good . . .hit detection is very poor . . .foes will often leap on top of the player as Tim's punches fly through them with no effect." —Anthony Romero (www.tohokingdom.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls in *Circus Caper* are decent . . .the bonus games aren't very responsive . . .characters seem so stiff and unanimated. Tim just seems like a rectangle that was colored in an attempt to make it look like a human being . . .a few of the enemies are so blurred and distorted that you can't even tell what they are. The rest of the graphics are just okay . . . The music is just standard NES fare. No classic circus music is used . . . While the sounds may be very good, they just do not fit in with their accompanying actions . . . The abundance of weapons and the simplicity of collecting them makes many of the levels easy to get through after only a few tries." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

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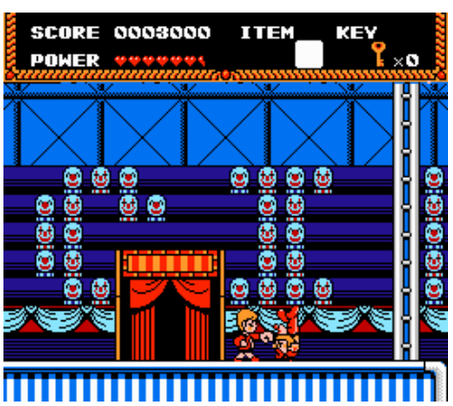
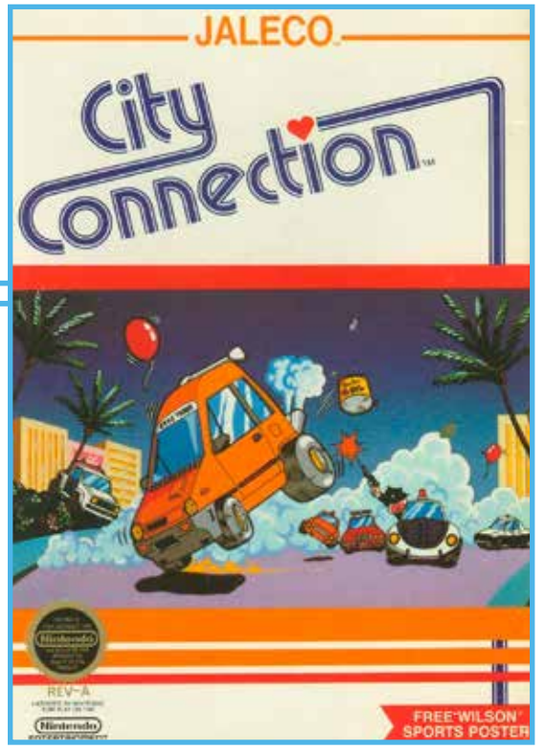
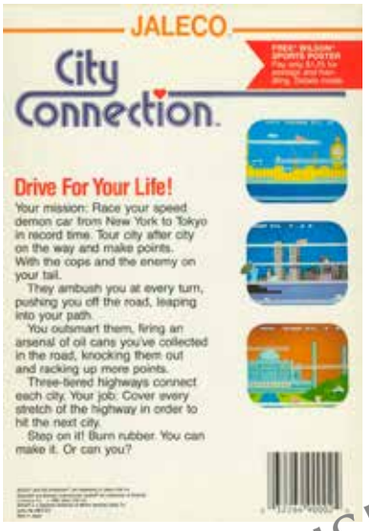


City Connection

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: Hect
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1988




JALECO
City Connection
Drive For Your Life!
Your mission: Race your speed demon car from New York to Tokyo in record time. Tour city after city on the way and make points. With the cops and the enemy on your tail.
They ambush you at every turn, pushing you off the road, leaping into your path.
You outsmart them, firing an arsenal of oil cans you've collected in the road, knocking them out and racking up more points.
Three-tiered highways connect each city. Your job: Cover every stretch of the highway in order to hit the next city.
Step on it! Burn rubber. You can make it. Or can you?

Notable Quotable:
"Music and sound effects are outstanding. All show excellent craftsmanship—from the simple boinking sound of an oil can bouncing off a police car to the tremendous crash as your car blows apart . . . The graphics are nicely done, particularly the highway scenery . . .the police vehicles have a tendency to flicker . . .tough to master . . .a fun, if occasionally frustrating, game for all ages." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

An unusual, vehicle-based side-scroller, *City Connection* is somewhat similar conceptually to the console and computer classic *Miner 2049er*, but instead of walking around as a man named Bounty Bob, players take the wheel of a Honda City hatchback. The objective in each of the game's seven side-scrolling, multi-platform, wraparound levels is to drive over every section of highway, painting it in the process. Police cars frequently get in the way, as do buses, cats, and spikes (which appear when players spend too much time on any one level), but they can be jumped over or otherwise avoided. In addition, the car can shoot oil cans at enemy vehicles. Grabbing three red balloons transports players one or two levels ahead. Like its better-looking coin-op cousin that Jaleco released in 1985, this port features such familiar landmarks in the background as the Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower.

Notable Quotable:
"The controls take a long time to get used to . . .the levels will continue looping forever; this means it's just a matter of time until you lose all lives or just get bored . . . This is a simplistic game, perhaps too much so. While nostalgia for these arcade ports on NES is understandable, this one is still well below par." —Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: *City Connection* is so bizarre, but my sister and I couldn't stop renting it. There isn't much to it, but we just kept coming back for three things. One was the stupid, hilarious joy that came with running over the darn cats in the game. The poor thing just hilariously flies diagonally upward for all eternity. Another was what happened when you crashed your car, which is still one of the strangest things I've seen in a video game. Your vehicle explodes into several pieces, which are just literally pieces of your car's sprite, and those pieces spread slowly outward across the stage, ignoring all laws of physics and gravity. But then they all turn into hearts and dance around the stage for a few seconds. Which . . .I honestly don't know what that's about, but it's funny. Finally, we have the game's music. I originally played this game when I was a kid, and I'm pretty sure I was in my thirties when I realized the music was actually a classical piece they adapted for the soundtrack. What a weird game . . .—Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

Clash at Demonhead

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Vic Tokai
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Tasked with exploring Demonhead Mountain, rescuing Professor Plum from the Governors of Demonhead, and deactivating a doomsday bomb, Sergeant Billy "Big Bang" Blitz of the special Assault Brigade for Real Emergencies (S.A.B.R.E)—who you control—is an extremely versatile protagonist in this expansive game. In addition to standard platforming moves he can squat, swim, and strap on hyper boots (for increased speed and power). Some items, such as a jet pack for flying and a super suit that lets Bang climb ice walls and swim in lava, are required for navigating past certain areas. The running, jumping, climbing, and shooting (demons and monsters) gameplay is fun and challenging, despite the game being far less known than such widely heralded mega-hits as *Contra*, *Metroid*, and *Super Mario Bros. 3* (yes, the game belongs among those ranks, or at least a notch below). A map screen lets you select your routes, and anime-style graphics, quirky humor, and strange bosses add to the game's appeal. Backtracking, non-linear gameplay, and a shop where Bang can purchase armor, weapons, and other items means *Clash at Demonhead* should appeal to RPG fans.

Notable Quotable:

"*Clash at Demonhead* has some of the most imaginative critters found in any NES game. My favorite is a sort of flying ball that sticks out its tongue as it hurls energy bombs . . . Many of the characters look like something Robert Crumb might have drawn if he had worked for Walt Disney. The sound effects are outstanding. Gunshots and explosions are very realistic. The music, however, isn't quite as catchy as some other games of this type. The graphics are some of the best around . . . constant action and a game of discovery. To win, you must explore every route. Don't be surprised to find yourself backtracking frequently. You'll have to in response to some clues." —*Compute's Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Insider Insight: The first time I laid eyes on *Clash at Demonhead* was when I received it as a Christmas present. I had never heard of the game so I had no idea what it was about. Looking at the box art, I expected a thrilling, action-packed experience, and my eight-year-old self wasn't wrong. *Clash at Demonhead* is about as open-world as it could get on the NES. It was a big game that had me both awestruck and totally confused. You play as a character named Billy Big Bang who has to explore the world and defeat all the bosses scattered throughout. I remember endlessly trying to complete the game, but it was difficult. The game was definitely ahead of its time. I spent that Christmas sitting in front of the TV with my older brother, exploring the vast worlds. There's so much to do in the game that I have still yet to complete it. —"8-Bit" Eric Perez, YouTube personality

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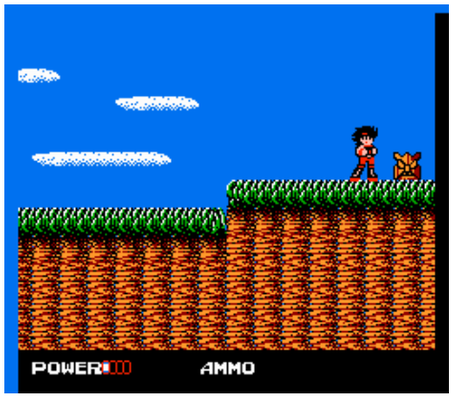
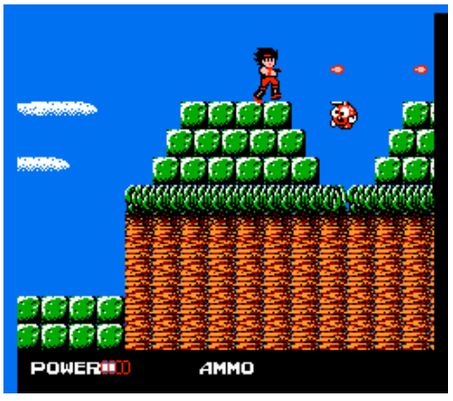
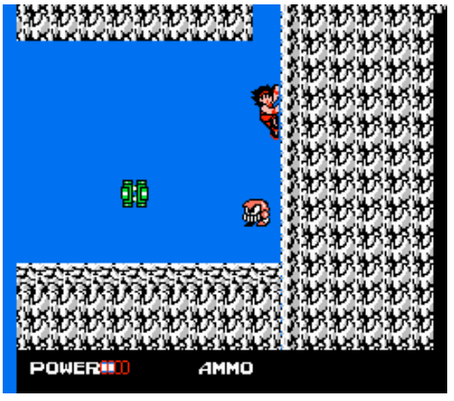
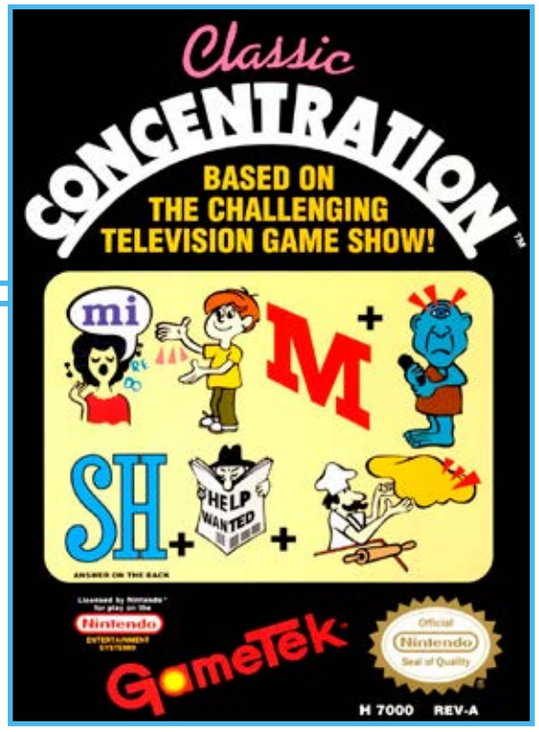






Classic Concentration

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Softie
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



Based on the TV game show that aired on NBC from 1987 through 1991 (earlier incarnations of the program were simply titled "Concentration"), *Classic Concentration* has players opening doors on a rebus-filled, 25-door game board. Each door hides the name of a prize, such as a trip or a mink coat. During each turn, players open two doors in hopes of getting a match, which will grant the player that prize and make that pair of doors disappear. Each door that disappears reveals part of a rebus puzzle. After any match the player can guess the rebus puzzle. Wild cards, eight selectable contestants, and timed final rounds add to the fun. As with most video games based on game shows, puzzles do begin repeating themselves sooner than most players would prefer. The game is similar to (but harder and more sophisticated than) *Hunt & Score* for the Atari 2600.

Notable Quotable:
"If you're a gameshow enthusiast you should enjoy *Classic Concentration*. (I watched the original show when I was a kid and even had the board game.) It's a simple game, but entertaining for the entire family. It's good for parties, too." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The *Classic Concentration* game show wasn't particularly memorable for me during my childhood, but the video game version was . . . An eye exam ended and my ophthalmologist recommended an NES to help my poor hand/eye coordination. My now-late mother was all for anything that would do that, so we hit up a local pawn shop and picked up the system with three games—the *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt* cart that every NES owner has had at least one copy of, the Zapper light gun to play *Duck Hunt*, and *Classic Concentration*. I'm not sure if that game did much to help my vision, but I remember my mother and I having a lot of fun playing with the dopey-looking characters . . .about as accurate as you're going to get for a representation of the show . . .it amazed me how well it's held up . . . I enjoyed the wacky music. The character designs are even more ridiculous than I remember." —Jeremy Peeples (venturebeat.com)

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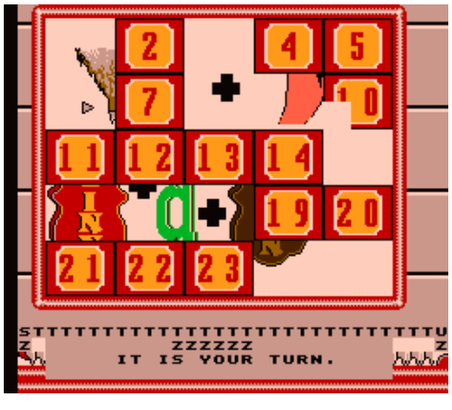
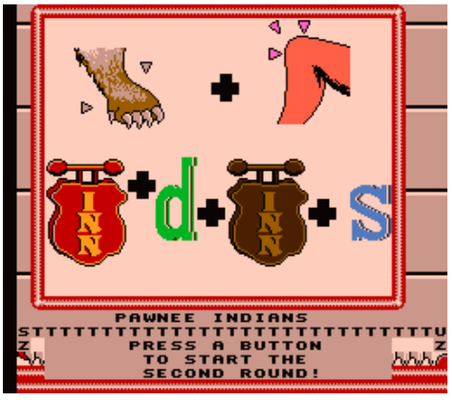
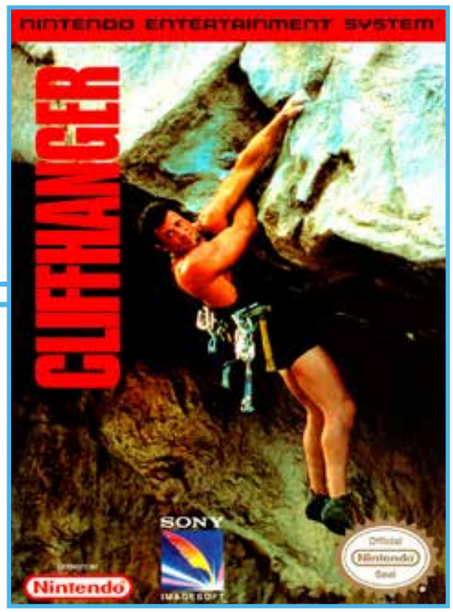




Insider Insight: When I was a kid, I would beg my mom to play my NES with me. She didn't understand how I could play video games for hours upon hours without getting bored. I wanted to show her how easy it was to get lost in a video game's world. I tried getting her to play *Super Mario Bros.*, *Excitebike*, and even *The Legend of Zelda*, but she just didn't get any entertainment out of them. It wasn't until I rented *Classic Concentration* from our local rental shop that she enjoyed playing a video game. Once we got home, I plugged the game in my NES and it caught her eye immediately. She asked, "Is that like *Classic Concentration* the gameshow?" After I told her it was she said she wanted to play, and she quickly became hooked. After a few hours I grew tired of the game's monotonous music, and I begged her to let me play something else. She asked me if she could play just a few more rounds and then she'd let me play whatever I wanted. Well, a few more hours went by and I was exhausted. I crawled my way up to my bedroom as she continued to play. I have no idea how long she played that night, but when I awoke the next morning and removed the cart from my console it was still warm. We ended up buying that game from the rental shop. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

Cliffhanger

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft
DEVELOPER: Spidersoft
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



Based on the 1993 feature film, *Cliffhanger* puts players in the role of Rocky Mountain rescue ace Gabe Walker, who Sylvester Stallone played in the movie. Walker must run, jump, crouch, climb (on ladders and ropes), and make flying leaps through seven poorly drawn, washed-out levels of mountain-based action, collecting money and dodging such obstacles as falling icicles, runaway boulders, and bottomless pits. Walker can punch and kick venomous bats, rabid wolves, evil henchmen, and other enemies he will meet, but he can also pick up and use a gun, a knife, dynamite, and rocks. Other pick-ups include spiked boots (for running in snow) and climbing gloves (for ascending a frozen waterfall). Near the end of the game Walker must battle Eric Qualen's helicopter and then Qualen himself (in the movie Qualen was played by John Lithgow).

Notable Quotable:
"*Cliffhanger* is a feeble attempt with a license. The graphics are very poor, even compared to other 8-bit games. The audio grates on your ears and the control is not even worth mentioning . . .comes off as a first-generation game, but with more softs like this, it'll be the last generation. This game needs an overhaul to be even somewhat palatable. Very poor." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)

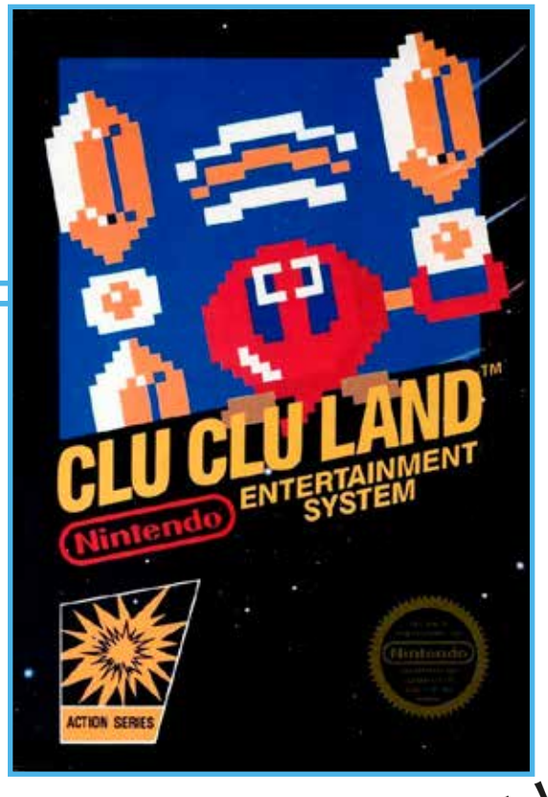
Notable Quotable:
"Sylvester Stallone (Gabe) resembles a little green leprechaun, and those cliffs look awfully fake . . .requires you to make a lot of long running leaps . . .If you can survive the first chapter the difficulty eases up and the game gains traction. Trading punches with henchmen looks silly, but it's satisfying to watch them fall off the cliffs and plummet to their deaths . . . Occasionally you'll acquire a weapon like a knife or a gun, but these are rare . . .if you can overcome the initial frustration you may find it worth your while." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Terrible, often-Atari 2600 quality graphics . . .abhorrent play control . . . Eventually you learn to time your punches to match the unresponsive gameplay—that is if you've stuck it out long enough to get the hang of it. But trust me, you'll get sick of it long before that time. *Cliffhanger* may have made for an entertaining movie, but its NES incarnate amounts to nothing else than a horrible way to waste some time. Avoid this game at all costs—unless you need something to throw off of a cliff." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Clu Clu Land

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1985



A system launch title, *Clu Clu Land* is a challenging, highly original take on the maze genre. The game has players guiding a cute, round, fish-like creature named Bubbles around a series of non-scrolling mazes marked with turn posts. The only way to make turns in each maze is by bouncing off walls or by hooking a hand around said turn posts. Each maze contains a pattern of hidden gold bars. When Bubbles passes above a hidden bar it will appear onscreen. The objective is to uncover all the hidden gold bars (forming an outline of a picture, such as a face or a house) to progress to the next maze. While Clu Clu works at uncovering gold bars deadly sea urchins prowl the maze, but they can be warded off with electric shocks. Other things appearing in the maze include black holes, rubber traps, timers (for freezing the clock, the sea urchin, and the opposing player), and money sacks and fruit (for extra points).

Memories: This is a quality title up to Nintendo standards, but some players, including myself, will prefer games where you walk through mazes the traditional way by simply pressing up, down, right, and left. The maze game is one of my favorite genres. The NES doesn't have many in that category, as the console came out a couple of years after the genre was in vogue, but it does have some good ones, including *Pac-Man*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Pac-Mania*, and *Trog!*, my favorite maze title for the system.

Notable Quotable:
"This game is original . . .features a completely unique play mechanic that will force you to develop a new set of controller skills. The graphics and music are cute and whimsical, but pretty much irrelevant—gameplay is everything here . . .simple, uncomplicated, and just plain fun." —*Digital Press* #29 (March/April 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"An odd and unique mix between *Pac-Man* and *Qix* . . .a lot of fun . . .the first challenge is not to find the gold bars, but to master the unique controls . . .once you get the hang of it, the game reveals itself and becomes an enjoyable and addicting experience. Graphics and sounds are unquestionably simple (it's an early game after all), but they do the job fine. The two-player mode is also fun and adds a whole other layer to the game . . .once you've visited the five color-coded stage types then the game becomes a bit repetitive . . .*Clu Clu Land* has aged a bit, but it is still as innovative and as fun as it was back in the day. —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Cobra Command

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Data East
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1988

A pedestrian port of the 1988 Data East arcade game, *Cobra Command* has poor controls and replaces the sharp, textured graphics of the original with sheer mediocrity (including blurry backgrounds). Players guide a copter back and forth across scrolling skies (pressing "start" makes it flip around to the left and the right), firing away at enemy choppers, tanks, soldiers, cannons, and warships, and frequently swooping down to lower a rope or a ladder to rescue hostages. A highlight of the game is destroying enemy fortresses to reveal underground pathways to the troops that are in need of rescue. The copter can be upgraded with various types of guns, missiles, and armor. Gameplay is similar to the ubiquitous, multi-platform classic *Choplifter*, but not as good (thanks in part to rough scrolling). Also similar to *Chopper Command* for the Atari 2600. Not to be confused with the 1984 laser disc arcade game.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Enemies come at you from all directions, but shooting and flying simultaneously is difficult because your nose tips up or down based on the direction you're moving. The muddy graphics are also unimpressive, making *Cobra Command* difficult to recommend." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I was really surprised by how taken I was with this game. It is, at its core, a simplistic early NES game; all you really do is shoot stuff and rescue hostages. It's just surprising how all of the mechanics work flawlessly . . . The first time I rescued a hostage, it was so seamless I almost didn't realize what was happening. It's incredibly simple, but effective . . .kept me wanting more." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

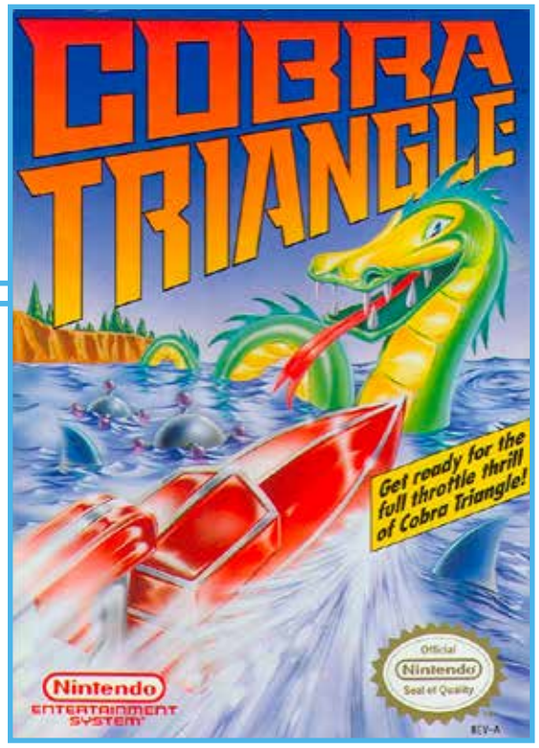
"Like a lot of NES games, the challenge was much greater than the games you see today . . .great sprites, but the backgrounds weren't great. The best part was upgrading your helicopter . . .your heli would take some damage and start flaming. This would make it a bit harder to fly until you could repair or finish the level. It was realistic compared to most games where you had a life bar and when it was empty, you exploded." —The NES Files (www.nesfiles.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Cobra Command* is a second-rate *Choplifter* clone with uninspired gameplay and awful control . . . With only three shooting angles it's very difficult to aim. Controlling your sluggish aircraft is a chore, especially when the screen is in the act of scrolling . . .background graphics are fair, but the explosions are just pathetic. Incredibly, shooting a helicopter or a soldier produces the same lame explosion. It's hard to find anything to like about *Cobra Command*." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Cobra Triangle

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Watercraft Racing/ Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989


COBRA TRIANGLE
Get ready for the full throttle thrill of Cobra Triangle!
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ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality

An interesting mix of genres, *Cobra Triangle* puts you behind the wheel of a Cobra Class Speed Boat, racing against other boats, jumping over waterfalls, shooting targets, sea monsters, protecting helpless swimmers, avoiding whirlpools, disposing of mines, and more. Pods can be collected for upgrading the boat's guns, missiles, and speed. You'll dodge sharks, riverbanks, and other such obstacles while spaceships fire at you. One button on the controller accelerates your boat while the other fires its gun. There are 25 mission-based levels to cruise through, each of which features an angled (isometric) *R.C. Pro-Am*-like perspective. An early game by Rare—the company that would go on to develop such favorites as *Perfect Dark* (Nintendo 64) and *Donkey Kong Country* (Super NES)—*Cobra Triangle* is a fun, finely programmed game that is challenging to the finish.

Notable Quotable:
"Rare has created some of the greatest games of all time, so it should be no surprise that *Cobra Triangle* exhibits the solid craftsmanship that has become the hallmark of Rare games . . .a variety of gameplay . . .an excellent purchase for any NES connoisseur." —*Game Informer* (March 2000)

Notable Quotable:
"You can tell that *Cobra Triangle* comes from the people that brought you *R.C. Pro-Am* because the same graphical style is in evidence. There are only eight levels to play, but each one is tougher than the last. Perhaps the most frustrating is the jump-the-waterfall section, but patience reaps rewards (as always). – *The Games Machine* (May 1990)

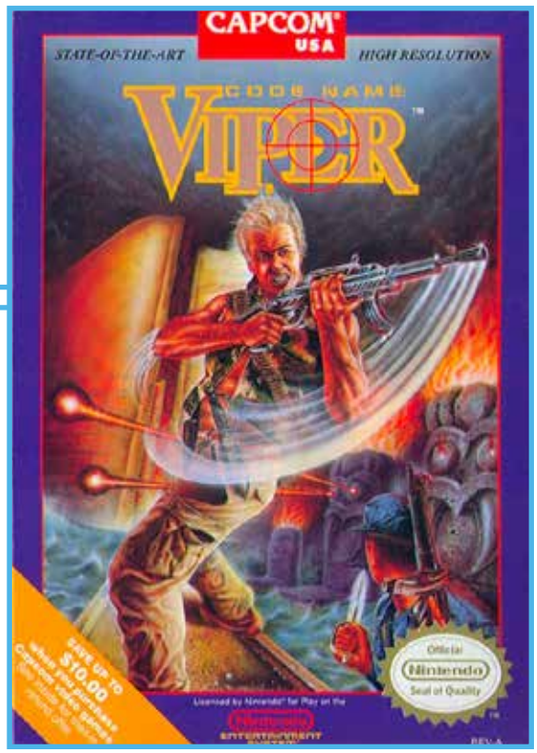
Notable Quotable:
"The graphics in *Cobra Triangle* are very good, and the action is fast and challenging. Handling the boat as you race along is a bit difficult at first, mainly because the game does such an accurate job of simulating the feel of a boat in water . . .don't expect to swerve around obstacles at the last minute as you might in a car-racing game. But once you get the feel of the Cobra boat you'll appreciate the added realism." —*Game Players* (March 1990)

Insider Insight: When people talk about NES games being difficult this one doesn't come up nearly as often as it should. I rented it once based on its awesome cover art. I kept renting it because it's incredibly fun to play. At a certain point I felt confident that I was decently good at it. I could regularly get pretty far, but what I assumed was the last bit of the game was absurdly difficult. I decided I'd do a little reconnaissance to find out how much farther I had to go to beat the game. I plugged in my Game Genie, put in some cheat codes, and got past the part where I was stuck, but the game kept going . . .and going . . .AND GOING! Turns out that crazy hard bit was only about halfway through the game and things got progressively more insane from there. To this day I don't know a single person who even claims to have beaten *Cobra Triangle* without the use of cheat codes. You think *Ninja Gaiden* is hard? *Cobra Triangle* and its helicopter powered boat would like to say hello. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Code Name: Viper

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom/Arc System Works
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



A dramatic, no-nonsense, War on Drugs–influenced game, *Code Name: Viper* puts players in the role of an agent fighting his way through the jungles of South America and a drug lord's fortresses, opening doors to find hostages, health, ammo, or a bomb you'll need to complete a level. (Doors are like a box of chocolates—you never know what you're gonna get.) Agent Viper is equipped with a handgun and a machine gun for killing snipers, mercenary guards, napalm soldiers, maniacs, frogmen, and hidden warriors. Obstacles to jump over (Viper can shoot and maneuver during jumps) or otherwise avoid include bombs, mines, dripping acid, and statue traps. Be sure and watch out for remote-controlled weapons, and you can duck under enemy fire. There are seven levels of run-and-gun action. Unfortunately, there is no two-player alternating mode, unlike Capcom's original 1989 arcade game.

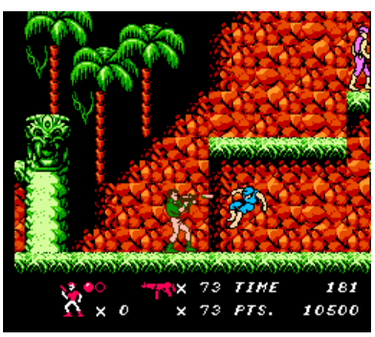
Notable Quotable:

"Expands upon *Rolling Thunder* and similar games by including intermissions and a storyline that fills in piece by piece . . .nicely drawn . . .the action is nonstop. The game is difficult, and you'll find yourself continuing a lot, but a password every three levels helps." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"A gritty graphical style . . .surroundings are often bleak while boasting a good color palette (favoring orange a tad too much at times). They range from jungle environs to semi-swanky palaces and even a factory (perhaps for the manufacture of drugs). That factory, by the way, is filled with spikes. I believe that's a primary criterion for Capcom games . . .the tunes seem to have a smooth mix of South American and even Middle Eastern influences . . . *Code Name: Viper* is HARD. On Easy mode it's hard. One slip of the thumb, one stray bullet, one poor jump . . .they can all lead to an unfortunate demise and a significant trip back to an earlier starting point in your stage . . . You need top-notch reflexes to even get past the first stage." —Random Access (randomacc.net)

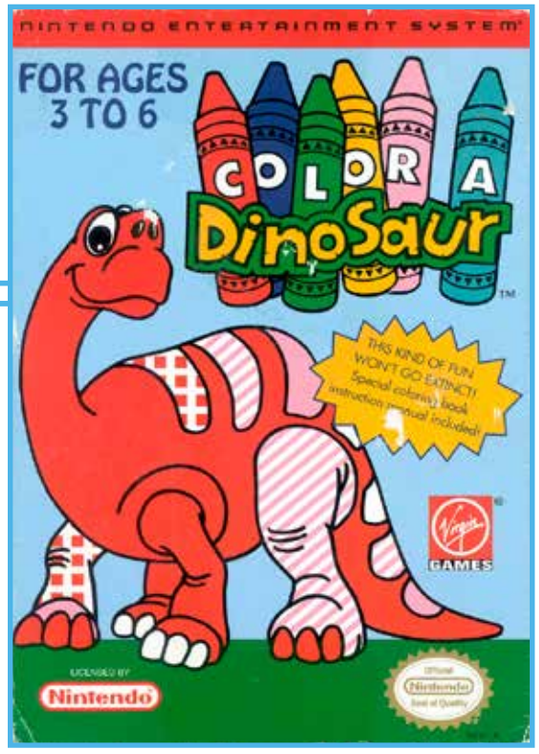
Insider Insight: Thanks to the *Game Player's Guide to Nintendo Games*, *Codename: Viper* is one of four games that I received for Christmas 1990. My mom showed me an ad that KB Toys (RIP) had put out with a list of NES games that were on sale. This was one of the cheaper titles on the list, and I thought that it looked interesting enough in *Game Player's* that I would ask for it. When I played it for the first time that Christmas morning the music drew me in, as it evoked a spy novel, or an old detective movie, especially with the bluesy song that plays in the first stage. I had a blast looking for hostages, figuring out that I could hide from enemies inside the doorways, and seeing what each stage had in store for me as I tromped through South America trying to stop a drug cartel from controlling the world through drugs. Later in life I was amused (and somewhat horrified) to discover that the classic arcade game *Rolling Thunder*, which released in Japan in 1986 and in the US in 1987, is very similar. The way the main characters walk, jump, and shoot is almost identical. Even the bad guys act similar. However, *Codename: Viper* has better, more varied music. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Color a Dinosaur

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games
DEVELOPER: FarSight Studios
GAME TYPE: Art, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



True to its title, *Color a Dinosaur* lets players do just that: color a dinosaur. Actually, there are 16 different dinosaur o[illegible] (including a Tyrannosaurus Rex, a T[illegible]ps, a Brontosaurus, and a Pterodactyl), and there's not really any coloring involved, since clicking on a section of a dinosaur simply prompts the computer to automatically box in that section with color. There are 4 palettes, 11 colors, and 9 patterns from which to choose. The manual, which includes a brief history of dinosaurs, recommends that users record their creations on VHS tape, which is no big deal, since any TV-based video game can be recorded in this fashion. The award-winning Tommy Tallarico (*Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, *Maximo: Ghosts to Glory*) did the music and sound, but a lack of animations, celebrations, or any other such flourishes makes *Color a Dinosaur* extremely limited in nature. This rare game is recommended for children ages three to six.

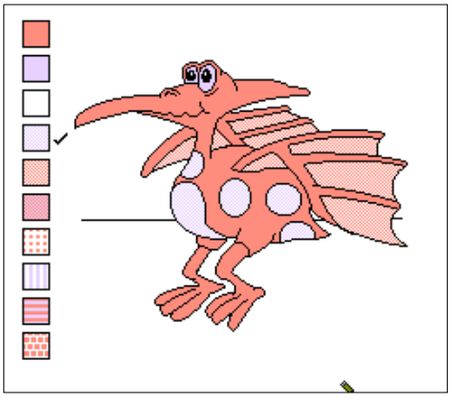
Memories: My friend Tommy Tallarico—a legend in the industry—did the music for *Color a Dinosar* more than a decade before I first met him at the Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas in the mid-2000s. In a recent interview on YouTube, as he held up his rare factory-sealed copy of the game, he cited it as the worst title he ever worked on.

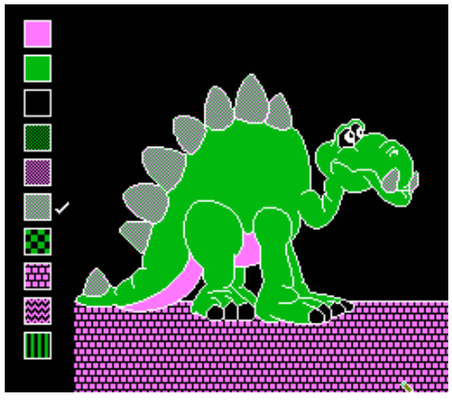
Notable Quotable:

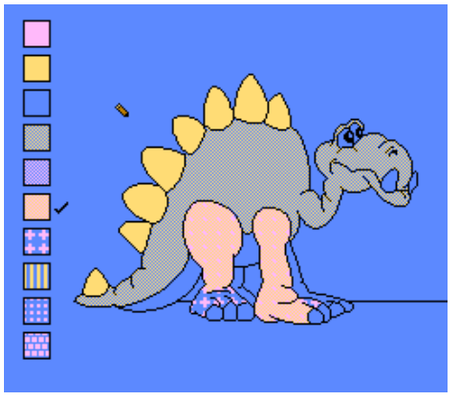
"The dinosaur drawings themselves are kind of cute, and the music, by none other than Tommy Tallarico, is at least catchy, though there isn't a lot of it, so it does grate a bit after a while, and the interface is simple enough that you could reasonably expect a small child to handle it. The problem? With 16 pictures, and 4 palettes of 3 colors each and no save feature, the game stacks up fairly poorly when compared to the much cheaper option of just buying an actual coloring book and a box of crayons." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

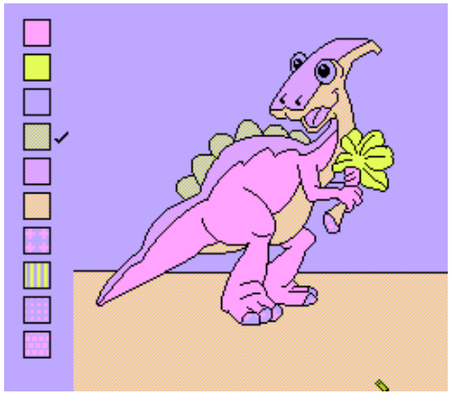
Notable Quotable:

"Most of the time, dinosaurs are awesome by default, but the images *Color a Dinosaur* offers are decidedly uncool. There are no spectacular poses, no thrilling action shots, no detailed backgrounds. Many of the pictures only look vaguely dinosaur-esque. Stan Gorman, the former Creative Director for Virgin Games, described them as 'fantasy dinosaurs,' which seems reasonably accurate . . . Unless you opted to color freehand—a near-impossible task with the NES controller—filling in your dinosaur was a lengthy, excruciating process." —Mandi Odoerfer (retrovolve.com)





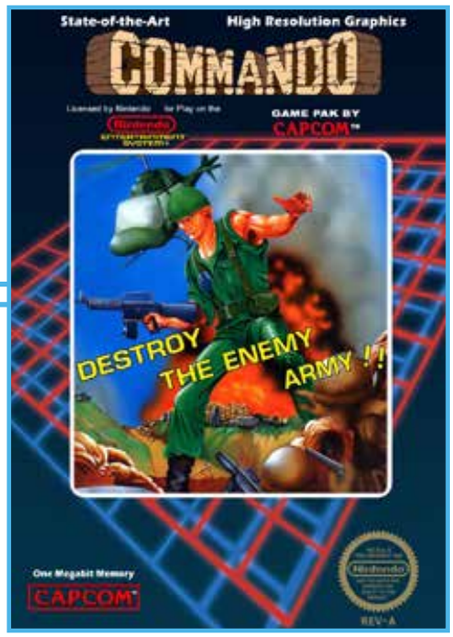




OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Commando

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Run and Gun, 1 or 2 players
YEAR: 1986



Based on the 1985 Data East arcade game, *Commando* is a capable port featuring rock solid gameplay, but less detailed graphics and lots of flickering (especially among the vehicles that drive across the screen). Armed with a rifle and a limited number of grenades (which can be replenished), players, as Super Joe, must work into a "deep, unexplored jungle region," shooting and bombing members of the Evil Empire Army, some of whom hide behind barricades, perch on bridges, and duck into holes. Enemies are equipped with knives, guns, and grenade launchers, and they swarm like crazy all over the screen, providing a fairly intense gaming experience. To accommodate the dimensions of a typical television screen, the playfield is much wider than that of the more rectangular coin-op classic. Also the ground in the NES game is orange instead of tan, and Super Joe is shown eating instead of smoking as he rests at the end of the first level. Ah, those Nintendo puritans.

Notable Quotable:
"*Commando* is a fantastic arcade game that lost its luster when it came to the NES. The graphics are hampered by a familiar NES flicker that is downright annoying. While *Commando* is memorable, its glory lies in being a fairly average arcade-to-home translation." —*Game Informer* (July 2000)

Notable Quotable:
"*Commando* is ideal for blast brigadiers who want to show their mettle against tenacious computer-directed opposition. Few cartridges can equal its non-stop action. This is one coin-op hit which should certainly prove popular among home video gamers as well." —*Computer Gaming World* (Septemer 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"A fast paced action game of skill and fortitude . . .this version does not disappoint . . .parts of trucks and jeeps will flash for a second or two here and there. It also occurs intermittently with the enemy . . . It is a shame there is this problem as the game itself is quite excellent . . .graphics are colorful and crisp." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1986)

Notable Quotable:
"Capcom nailed the gameplay to near perfection and added enough secrets and exclusive content to justify its existence . . .technically remarkable . . .the screen is always teeming with enemies . . .the action is intense and practically non-stop . . .the soundtrack is forgettable . . .the graphics are average . . .the game is fairly short . . .the action is clean, fast, and beautifully staged. – Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: I was Super Joe, a badass running, shooting, hostage-saving, grenade-throwing killing machine. Reminiscent of Rambo, I took on an entire army by myself. This didn't seem unrealistic to me. My odds of survival were higher because I was the good guy . . .right?

I'm thrown into battle without explanation as I maneuver through the war zone at a *Robotron*-like pace. The TV was so cluttered it flashed and flickered in a seizure inducing manner. Super Joe was superhuman, but he wasn't invincible. A single bullet, whether to his face or his shoes, and a life was lost. It was the ultimate test of my reflexes.

Within the first 90 seconds I killed about 60 soldiers. Super Joe reflected on the carnage by taking a smoke break and letting it all sink in. "Who were the people I killed? Did they have families? What country is this? What am I doing here?" None of that mattered. The patriotic pulse-ridden music assured me I was serving my country and making fellow Americans proud.

Upon completing the game I was awarded with bad grammar: "Your All Mission Is All Over (?) Your (!) Great Player, This Game Was Ended." This was years before *Zero Wing*'s infamous "All your base are belong to us." My Dad was an English teacher, so I was especially sensitive to this.

Super Joe came along at the right time—the height of '80s action movies. Joe was indeed super. I can only imagine the war stories he had to tell upon returning home. —Sean Tiedeman, filmmaker, director of *The King of Arcades*

Conan

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: System 3 Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

Mindscape Presents
CONAN
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Robert E. Howard, who created pulp anti-hero Conan in 1932 via a series of stories published in *Weird Tales* magazine, would roll over in his grave if he played the dreadful, poorly programmed *Conan* for the NES. Adapted from the PC game *My[illegible]tory in the Making*, the game puts play[illegible] the role of the famous barbarian journeying through the Catacombs of Belveras, the Ruins of Ry-leeh, the Forests of Asgard, and other exotic (or at least exotic sounding) worlds. Conan jumps on platforms and uses pitiful, sluggish attacks—including short-range punches, limp swordsmanship, and hard-to-execute jump kicks—to battle imps, Satan, skeletons, Medusa, giants, dragons, and other enemies. Conan begins the game bare-fisted, but he can acquire swords and other weapons by defeating his foes. Conan jumps upwards in place when you press UP, but oddly enough, he also jumps—leaps forward, to be precise—when you press DOWN. Crouching is needlessly confusing as well, as you must hold A, then press DOWN. Beating the game, which is virtually impossible without cheat codes, "rewards" players with an ending that is as lame and as hastily put together as the game itself. *Conan* is fairly hard to find, but that's probably a good thing.

Memories: When I was a kid I would go into my cousin's room and read his *Savage Sword of Conan* comic books when he was gone with my big brother and big sister and the rest of the older cousins. Later I discovered Robert E. Howard's masterful short stories, and I thoroughly enjoy both *Conan* films starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. One day I hope to make it out to the annual Robert E. Howard Days in Cross Plains, Texas, where Howard lived from age 13 in 1919 until his death in 1936. I enjoyed *Conan* on the Xbox 360 to some degree, but I'm perfectly fine if I never play the lousy NES take on the character ever again.

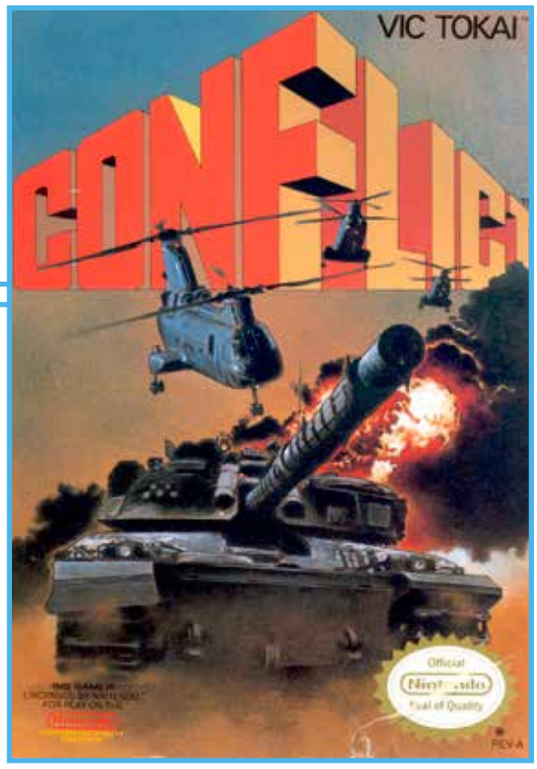
Notable Quotable:
"The game's structure is somewhat interesting—it's kind of a combat puzzle. Somewhere on each level is a special item you'll need to overcome the boss monster, and the main objective is to find and/or figure out how to get that item . . .a lot more difficult than it needs to be. There's plenty of extra life energy to be found, but it's not much help if you're dropped into a pit, and there are no passwords or continues . . . While some of the backgrounds are nice, the graphics generally aren't quite up to par." —*Game Players* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Anyone who's ever read any of the *Conan* stories knows it has everything you need to make a good game: swordplay, blood, guts, violence, sex, hideous monsters, people getting their brains smashed with big pieces of meat, etc. If there's another guy in the story mentioned by name it's a good bet Conan ends up killing him; if there's a woman Conan will hook up with her; if there's a legend of a monster at the beginning it will turn out to be real at the end . . . This game, however, doesn't share any of that . . .all Conan does is jump around and kill the same two or three bad guys over and over again . . . He looks like something you'd see on a ColecoVision—tiny, three colors, no face. This game came out in 1991, the same year as *Battletoads* and *Batman: Return of the Joker*, so don't tell me they couldn't have made it look better. Conan's saving grace is that he's semi-well animated." —Ultimate Console Database (ultimateconsoledatabase.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Conflict

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Vic Tokai
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



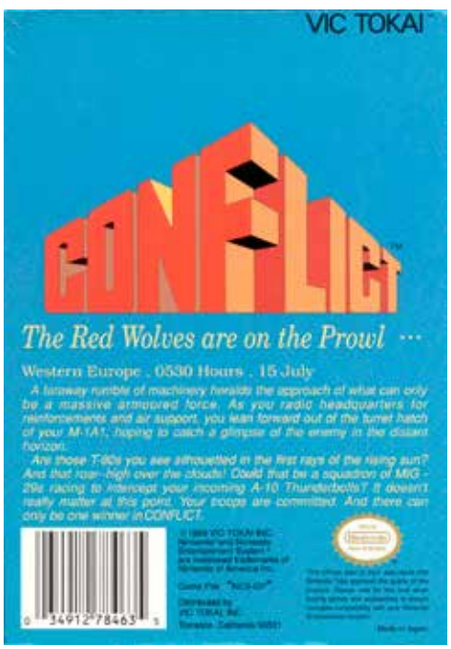
A turn-based strategy game pitting NATO forces (the good guys) against members of the Warsaw Pact (the bad guys), *Conflict* has players maneuvering air and ground forces across 16 different top-down view hexagonal maps, all featuring fictional scenarios. The hexagons represent a variety of terrain, from bridges, to mountains, to water, to grassy plains, to woodlands. The ultimate goal is to destroy the opponent's Flag tank: an M1A1 for the blue team and a T-80 for the guys in red. This is achieved by giving tactical orders to offensive and defensive units, capturing cities and air bases, and defeating enemy units. Successful operations net players "fame" points which can be used by factories to produce weaponry. In *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 2 (N–Z), New York Times* best-selling author John Jackson Miller gives his thoughts on *Super Conflict*, the sequel to *Conflict* featuring a fictional, Gulf War-like setting.

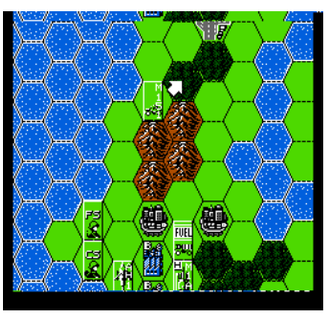
Notable Quotable:

"Though it's fairly straightforward to play and easy to get the basic hang of, *Conflict* may be one of the most frustrating and difficult titles for the NES . . . There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is that the computer (in the one player game) starts out with a ridiculous advantage over the human player . . . Graphically speaking, *Conflict* is good but not great: the map screens that make up the majority of the game get the job done, but aren't especially colorful or detailed. Battle scenes are a little better, featuring decent animation and a fairly accomplished level of detail in showing the various units. Given that much of the game is menu driven control issues aren't really a problem, but the sound is extremely monotonous, even if the tunes heard in the game aren't bad in and of themselves." —Very Helpful (veryhelpful.net)

Notable Quotable:

"I hope hexagons are your favorite shape, because you are going to be seeing A LOT of them . . . The great thing about this game is that it doesn't babysit you. You can't just send your army in masses to the enemy and expect to win. Nope, you need to also take a look at your unit's armor, its fuel, its ammunition, and its range. It's all about deploying at the right time and at the right location. The last thing you want to do is send in a chopper too far only to have it crash because it ran out of fuel over enemy territory. You'll need to think about each move and anticipate your enemies. Should you focus on hacking away at their units one at a time, or spread out your army to cause a distraction? And don't forget to protect your flag tank. There's a hell of a lot to think about in this easy-to-learn, difficult-to-master strategy game. —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)





OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Conquest of the Crystal Palace

PUBLISHER: Asmik
DEVELOPER: Quest
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

For many years the Crystal Palace was a thriving, prosperous, peaceful kingdom, kept this way by a gentle ruler named Bastor. One day Zaras, an evil War Spirit of the [illegible]tieth century, simulated an army of evil [illegible]ans and took over the Crystal Palace, killing the King and Queen and sending the rest of the people to live amongst the stars. Well, most of the rest of the people. Prince Farron was transformed into a six-month-old baby, and Zapolis, the palace and guardian keeper, was turned into a dog. The palace became an evil lair of mazes and chambers filled with all kinds of nasty creatures from Zaras' imagination. Upon Farron's fifteenth birthday, he and Zap the dog set out to reclaim and restore peace to the formerly great land. You must guide our heroes through five stages of medieval mayhem: Mount Crystal, Realm of the Guardian, Lair of the Hungry Ghosts, Gateway of Flame, and Realm of Zaras; the Crystal Palace. Each stage is guarded by a boss (there are two bosses in the last level). You begin the game with a power crystal (spirit, life, or flight) and a sword for battling the birds, skeletons, spiders, and other enemies you'll encounter. You can call on Zap at any time to run around, killing all the enemies. After you have killed an enemy you can pick up a coin for use in Kim's shop, where you can purchase herbs, potions, Zap Chow, a fire scroll, jumping shoes, a boomerang annihilator, the nuker (projectile that travels in a spiral), and other weapons and items. Jumping on moving ledges, avoiding spikes, and other such platforming staples supplement the combat nicely.

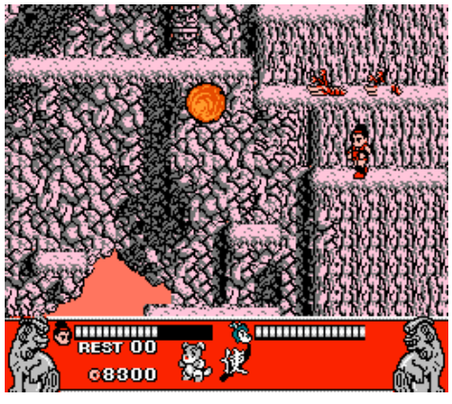
Notable Quotable:

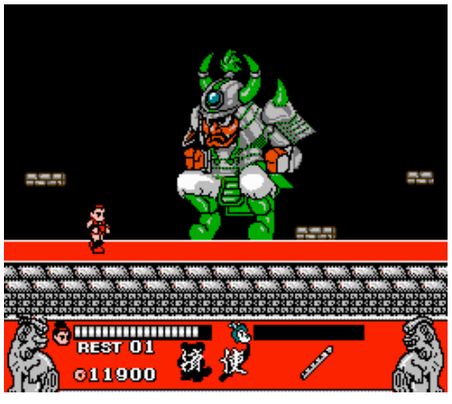
"It's in the higher tier of NES action platformers . . . Despite the hideous box, *Conquest of the Crystal Palace* is less of a beefy monster killing game and more of a classical Japan-themed action game . . . What separates *Conquest* from *Ninja Gaiden*, aside from the cutesy graphics, is the addition of Zap the dog." —Engadget (www.engadget.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Certain creatures (such as the rock-spitting monsters) can only be destroyed with Farron's sword—special weapons won't touch 'em. It works both ways, though, as there are other creatures who can only be destroyed with magic. It's trial and painful error to figure out what works best on who, but hey, that's half the fun . . . Farron and Zap aren't the heftiest of sprites, but the small details, such as Farron's blinking eyes, make up for it. This duo may be small in size, but they're giants when it comes to action. With all the thinking and action this cart requires, it's crystal clear why you won't get bored with this one." —*GamePro* (February 1991)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Contra

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988

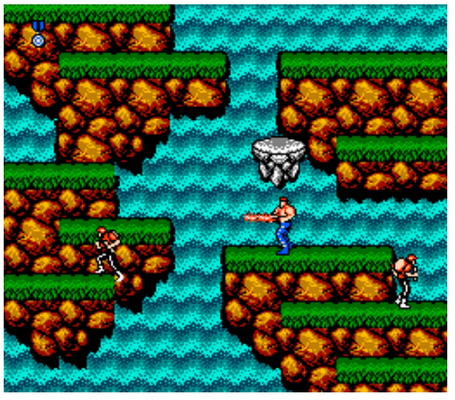
Putting the "hard" in hardcore, *Contra* is a tour de force of macho gaming, casting the player in the role of a [illegible]-bound soldier from the Special [illegible] elite commando squad. Armed with the ability to run, jump, duck, and fire a gun (at aliens and their evil henchmen), the guerilla warrior must blast his way through eight stages of brutal action: Jungle, Base 1, Waterfall, Base 2, Snow Field, Energy Zone, Hangar Zone, and Alien's Lair. Bases 1 and 2 sport a behind-the-soldier perspective while Waterfall features vertical scrolling. Capturing flying power-ups enables the player to upgrade their firepower to machine gun, laser, fireball, rapid fire, and most famously, the awesome spread gun. Like its more graphically detailed (yet less well-known) coin-op counterpart (Konami, 1987), a second gamer can join in for cooperative action. Pressing up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A at the title screen lets the player begin with 30 lives, a maneuver that popularized the famous Konami Code.

Memories: As with *Castlevania*, I bought *Contra* shortly after it came out. Buzz for the game was strong and it did not disappoint. I absolutely loved it. I didn't find out about the Konami code until later, so I played it over and over again with the few lives it would give you. I didn't mind, though because I dug every second of it and didn't know any better. I got so good at *Contra*—jumping and flipping away from bullets like some kind of buff ballerina—that I beat it without using any cheats. This says more about how many hours I put into the game than it does how skilled of a gamer I am.

Notable Quotable:
"Two-player contests are always in demand, because most video games are designed for a solo gamer. *Contra* is doubly welcome because it is a truly outstanding action epic." —*Computer Gaming World* (June 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Requires all the skill you can muster. The aliens come at you from every which way and only the fastest responses will save you! The action is non-stop . . .graphics are quite good . . . If you like action you should find many hours of exciting play here." —*Computer Entertainer* (March 1988)

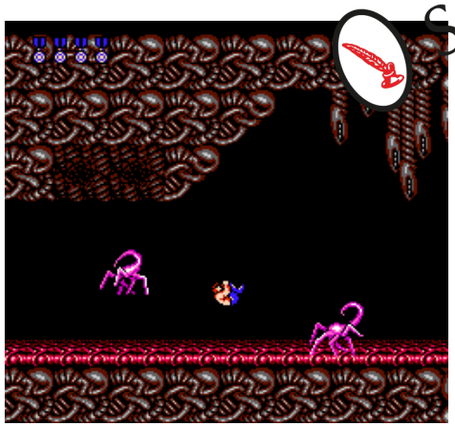
Notable Quotable:
"The commandos are awkward to control and have an annoying habit of crouching down facing in the wrong direction. The graphics improve throughout the game, but then again they have to; the early levels look primitive in the extreme. So, considering the NES games coming out at the moment—games that have outstanding graphics, sound, and playability—this really can't be recommended." —*Mean Machines* (January 1991)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Contra

THEY'VE GOT THE POWER.
YOU'VE GOT THE CONTROL.
Punch Konami's new Contra or Jackal video games into your Nintendo Entertainment System® and take charge of a handful of America's toughest commandos.
KONAMI



Insider Insight: It was summer 1988. I wasn't even five years old yet, but I had amassed quite a reputation for myself in the apartments where I lived. I could already read, I always ate my vegetables, and I loved gaming. *R.B.I. Baseball*, *Super Mario Bros.*, you name it,—I was awesome at it.

Then one day my neighbor—let's just call him Mike (who 20 years later would end up in prison on a murder charge. Hey, it was Brooklyn.)—introduced me to a game that changed my life forever. It kind of looked like *Mario*, but it was in the jungle and you had guns. Wait, this was nothing like *Mario*. This was nuts. The guns change when I pick these things up? This was amazing. But it was hard. I didn't want to play anymore. Wait, what? There's a fix? A secret code?

The Konami code, which "Mike" introduced me to, changed everything for me and made me absolutely love *Contra*. No longer would I have to wait for Dad to get home and plot our course of action. No longer would I have to ask my friends how to beat a level. No longer would I get angry when I died. Why? I had 29 more!

The Konami code allowed me to explore the levels of *Contra*, to take in its undeniable beauty and killer soundtrack and learn the ways of the alien force attacking. That code wasn't just a cheat to me—it was an introduction to gameplay design, mechanics, and the thought that what you saw wasn't what you got and that a video game is always more than the sum of its parts. Without *Contra*, it's fair to say I don't end up with the appreciation of games that I have. Yep, it's that heavy.

While it also incited a cheating scandal in gaming the industry had never seen before (real men don't need the code to finish *Contra*, or so they say) and changed the way we play in other regards, the code's inclusion on one of the best side-scrolling shooters was just another reason why the game is so special. It also fostered an extra strong bond between players in two-player action. Allowing players to "borrow" lives (the same way that a neighbor's mother would borrow bread no one ever returned), the stronger player could essentially guide the weaker player through the level.

Great games are played in a variety of ways. *Contra* is an excellent single-player shooter and an even better two-player romp. Add in the storied Konami code and you've got a game that is absolutely iconic. —Patrick Hickey Jr, author of *The Minds Behind the Games*, founder and editor in chief of ReviewFix.com

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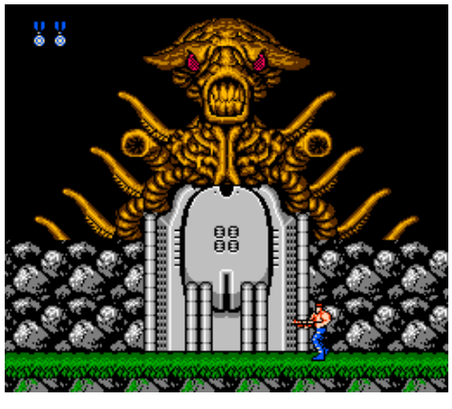

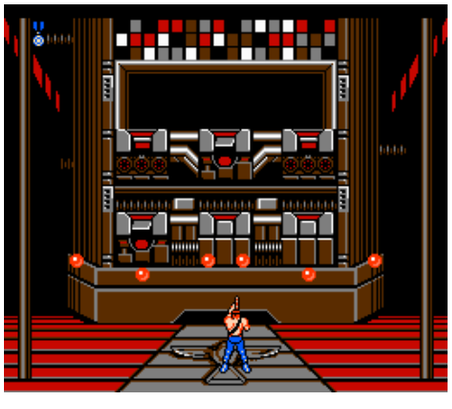

Contra Force

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

The third and final game in the NES *Contra* series, *Contra Force* is a departure from *Contra* and *Super C*—it's slower and l[illegible]nse, for example. Set in the fictional me[illegible] of Neo City, the game lets players select from four different characters (before and during gameplay), each with varying skills, including speed and jumping ability. A short-range pistol is the default weapon, but depending on the character, players can upgrade to hand grenades and machine guns (Burn); a flamethrower and a bazooka (Iron); a rifle and homing missiles (Smith); and time bombs and time mines (Beans). Simultaneous action returns, but solo players can now call upon an AI-controlled partner for assistance. To get this temporary help you have to hit pause and select the option from a menu, breaking up the flow of the game. Levels include Dewerdye Warehouse, U.S.S. Unkmy Battleship, Sheeshee Towers Construction Site, Thunder Wolf Helicopter, and C-Force Headquarters. Two of the five levels are viewed from overhead and scroll vertically. Released the same year as *Contra III: The Alien Wars* (Super Nintendo), *Contra Force* was originally going to be released under a different name ("Arc Hound" in Japan), but Konami decided to shoehorn it in as part of the *Contra* series, probably in an effort to boost sales.

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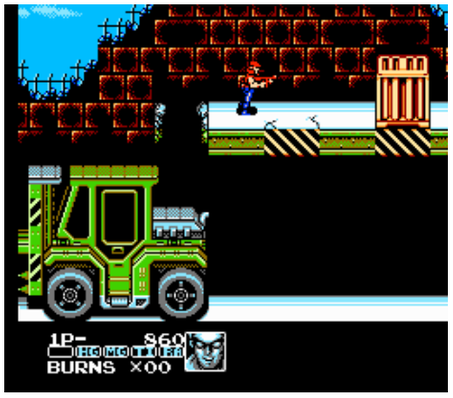

Notable Quotable:

"If you're thinking this cart delivers the same fast-paced, *Contra*-cool action as the previous games in the series, think again. You overestimated the power of the Force . . . The unfrantic pace is designed to enable you to think before you shoot, but who wants to do that? Flicker, sparse sprite detail, and occasionally washed out colors detract from the almost good-looking backgrounds. The music and sounds are unobtrusively average." —*GamePro* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"This notorious platform shooter is probably the biggest NES bust of all time . . .a catastrophe . . .terribly sluggish . . .a tremendous amount of flicker . . . The screen often doesn't scroll far enough, so you can't see what's ahead unless you 'push' yourself into danger. The collision detection is lousy and your default weapon has limited range. Even the selection screens are poorly designed and confusing . . .the graphics aren't bad . . . The lively musical score has a definite *Contra* flavor . . . There's no defending this atrocity." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecrtic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Mediocre . . . Nowhere near as bad as some people would make you believe. It has some really interesting ideas, but the spotty level design and severe slowdown prevent it from reaching its true potential." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Insider Insight: When I worked at FuncoLand, they would send us these little newspapers each month with the prices to every game we carried. That meant I held in my hand a complete list of NES games, which was pretty cool in the pre-internet days. So being a huge *Contra* fan, imagine my excitement when looking through that list I came across a third *Contra* game for NES called *Contra Force*. I had never seen nor heard of it before, and month after month it was always listed as one of the more expensive games for the console. One fateful day, I was at another store for a district meeting and I spotted a copy on their shelf. I immediately bought it and worked the remainder of my shift with great anticipation. Ultimately, the game didn't live up to my expectations (to put it politely), but it's always fun to discover something new about a franchise you love. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

Cool World

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

Based on Ralph Bakshi's 1992 film, which was a hybrid of animation and live action, *Cool World* puts gamers in the role of Detective Frank Harris (played by Brad [illegible] the movie), who must thwart the beautiful Holli Would's plan of getting a flesh-and-blood body and existing in the real world. This requires running and jumping through four areas (Cool World, The Highway, Sweet Place, and Countryside), dodging obstacles (collapsing platforms, acid rivers, manholes, and the like), collecting pieces of a map, and using cartoonish weapons to defeat goons, street urchins, a giant rabbit, dragons, and other enemies. Weapons include stink bombs, carrots, balloons, an eraser, a pen, and more.

Once Frank, who can move around in the foreground and use ledges in the background as platforms, makes it to the Ocean Hotel in Las Vegas, he must climb to the top of the building using window ledges and fire escape ladders, ultimately confronting Holli herself.

Memories: It's a bummer when you are disappointed by both a movie and the game it spawns. As a major Ralph Bakshi fan (my friends and I saw *Wizards* at the midnight movies many times in high school), I was super pumped about *Cool World*. Holli Would was certainly hot, but the film was meandering and lifeless. The NES game was even worse.

Notable Quotable:
"At first I thought this game was going to be a breeze, but it really is quite confusing . . .the only time I remotely enjoyed the game was during the highly irritating boss fights . . . The animations make absolutely no sense, especially when you get to the bosses and larger designed characters that DON'T EVEN ANIMATE. They just bounce around as static images. Talk about lazy. The sound effects and music sound like they were ripped from a 1980s PC game." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*Cool World* as a video game is a confusing romp through the doodle world as you try to make sense of nearly everything that happens. Trying to apply logic to this game may only make your head hurt . . . Even though there are power-ups you can snag in your travels, the lack of intuitive gameplay mars this game. It's a shame because I loved the movie and really wanted this to be a great tie-in. They say you can find secret rooms that will aid you in your journey. Your ultimate journey may involve retrieving a better game from your collection." —8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

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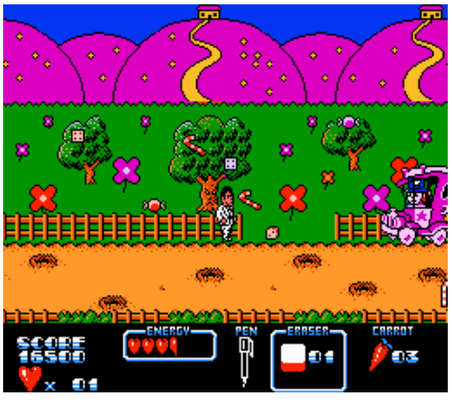
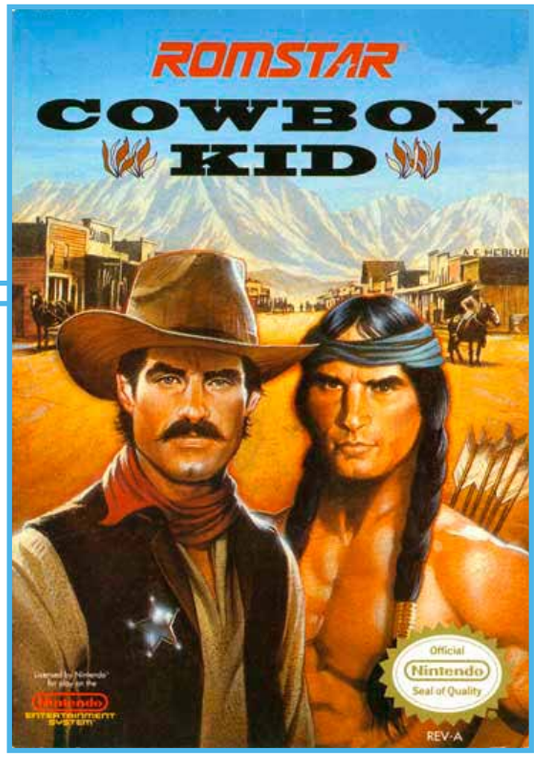


Cowboy Kid

PUBLISHER: Romstar
DEVELOPER: Pixel/Visco
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



In *Cowboy Kid*, players control a young gunslinger named Sam as he embarks on a mission to exact vengeance on the Scorpion gang for killing his father, who was sheriff of Villatown at the time of his death. After selecting a bandit to go after (from a list of such characters as Coyote Jim, Slash Joe, and Wild Wolf Chief), Sam will open treasure chests, talk to people, purchase items in shops, acquire guns and knives, ride a horse (from a top-down perspective) and a mine cart, and battle a bevy of bad guys. Sam can pick up keys to unlock doors, food to increase hit points, ladders to get out of lower levels, and a bulletproof vest for lowering damage from enemies. Watch out for skulls, which will reduce your hit points to 1. Sam can even play a little blackjack and enter a shooting gallery (fire at bad guys while avoiding innocents). The music fits the cartoonish Old West setting and the fighting scenes play a lot like a side-scrolling combat game. In two-player mode a sympathetic Indian warrior named Little Chief joins in to help. Unfortunately, the game is very hard to find.

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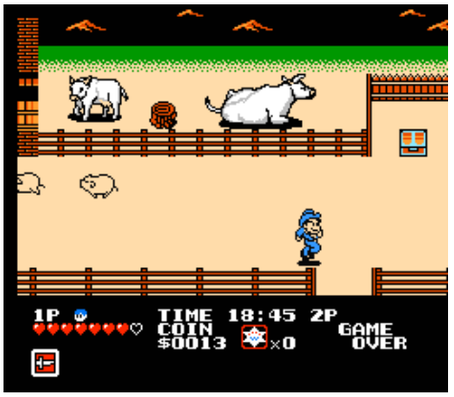
Notable Quotable:

"*Cowboy Kid* is *Ganbare Goemon* in a western setting and just as awesome . . . Each level is completely nonlinear, and you are free to explore to your heart's content within the 20-minute limit . . .no two stages are ever the same, with the game doing its best to make each level unique." —Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

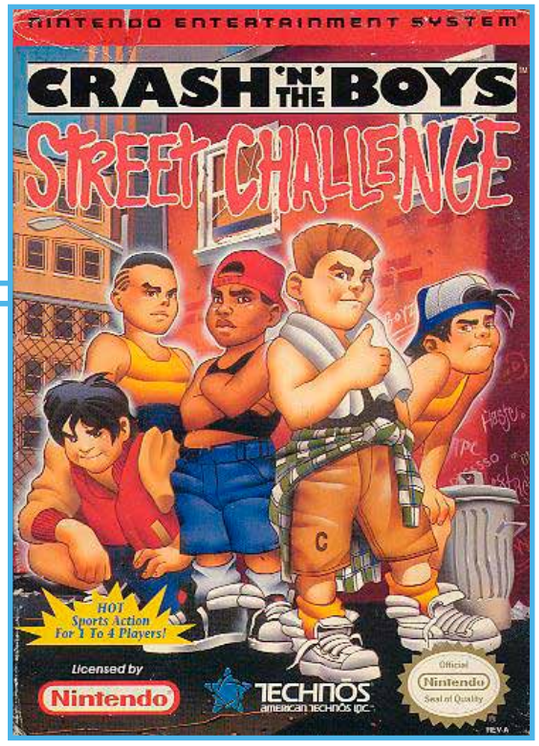
"A hidden gem . . .doesn't look like much at first. You start armed with a simple knife, you aimlessly walk around town, and the constantly respawning enemies quickly become a tedious chore . . . However, it is a game that really grows on you—as you reach the first boss and then complete another level, you realize that each area has been brilliantly thought out and has its own identity and themed appearance . . .the game regularly changes its pace and location to keep the player continually engaged; while one level gets you to fight on the roof of a train traveling at full speed, another demands you to ride a mine cart, a horse, or to investigate the town's creepy cemetery . . .long boss battles—these guys take a gazillion hits before they go down, and some fights are not that hard and just become a test of patience rather than skills." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)



Insider Insight: *Cowboy Kid* is one of many NES titles that has gained in popularity due to its rarity and ridiculously high price. The game is quite fun and blends the beat-'em-up and shooter genres nicely. That's not all it has going for it, though. There are a handful of mini-games, including a *Hogan's Alley*-like shooting range and even blackjack. I acquired my *Cowboy Kid* cart a few years back while perusing a retro game page on Facebook. A seller had a copy for sale that also included the manual. Since his asking price was reasonable I decided to purchase it, so I contacted the seller and asked for his PayPal information. I was a little too excited and didn't copy/paste his PayPal information when making the payment, and I missed a single letter in the address. The payment went through, but it was to the wrong person! This was hundreds of dollars mind you, so I was freaking out, and my heart was beating a mile a minute. Thankfully, the person I accidentally sent the money to contacted me right away and sent it back. It's nice to know there are still good people out there. I still have the cart and play it frequently, as the game offers a nice and quick playthrough. —Mike Vito, writer at HeyPooPlayer.com

Crash 'n' the Boys: Street Challenge

PUBLISHER: American Technos
DEVELOPER: Technos Japan
GAME TYPE: Sports/Miscellaneous, 1–4 players (alternating, two-player simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



Crash 'n' the Boys: Street Challenge has super deformed, *River City Ransom*-style characters competing in five different events. 400 Meter Hurdles is indeed a hurdle race, but players can kick the other runners and throw pieces of broken hurdles at them. Hammer Throw has players pressing a button rapidly to get their character to spin faster to throw the hammer farther down a golf-like course. The lack of an overhead view course-indicator ruins this game, since players cannot preview trap locations. Viewed from in front of the swimmers, Swimming is a swim race but with players pulling and kicking to try and drown one another. Roof Top Jumping has players pole vaulting and riding unicycles (across tightropes) to go from roof to roof. Finally, Fighting Scene (a.k.a. Judo) is a simple, one-on-one fighting game in which players punch, kick, jump-kick, charge, shoulder tackle, and pull off special moves. A shopping mall lets players purchase health and performance enhancing equipment.

Notable Quotable:

"It's going to take a lot of practice . . .this game has a bit of a learning curve when it comes to its controls. Luckily, there is a whole lot to laugh about even when you're losing because some of the facial animations the characters make are downright hilarious . . .a welcome addition to the *Kunio-kun* series. It's definitely not my favorite release from Technos, but I think any gamer that has any interest in the other titles should give this one a shot. Even though the difficulty is extremely high in some of the competitions, the multiplayer fun should keep things a bit more even on the playing field." —Mike Vito (www.heypoorplayer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The events don't quite play as you would expect. Most track and field video games will have you button mash madly to win . . .the events in this game are more complex . . . The graphics are fantastic with stylish character models and pixel-perfect cityscapes. Athletes are very well animated, and their facial expressions are suitably illustrated . . . The music is awesome, as it emphasizes the competitive nature of the events and the sweet reward of triumph quite thoroughly. You'll also hear some 8-bit reinterpretations of classical music during some story sequences. Sound effects are incredibly satisfying, especially during events that involve brawling, since they add substance to every hit . . .the presentation is so well done that you'll forget that you're playing an NES game." —Video Chums (videochums.com)

OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Crystal Mines

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams
GAME TYPE: Maze/Maze Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989

Fans of such games as *Boulder Dash*, *Dig Dug*, and *Mr. Do!* should enjoy *Crystal Mines* (at least to some degree), which has you guiding a mining robot (up, down, right, and left) in the mazes deep beneath the surface of a planet, grabbing crystals. The objective is to gather enough crystals to meet the quota within the time limit given in each of the game's 100 levels. When you have retrieved all the crystals in a level, the exit to the next level will appear. The view is from overhead, and the maze walls are comprised of blocks, rocks, boulders, dirt, and mud that you can shoot to clear pathways, gain access to crystals, and make rocks fall on enemies. Be careful, though, because you can cause a landslide that will crush your robot. You can also shoot the creatures roaming the mazes, but some are impervious to your shots and must be crushed or destroyed in an explosion. Prizes and weapons to find include rapid fire, increased firing range, bombs (be careful: explosions can kill the robot if you don't get out of the way), robot protection, bags of gold (for points), freeze timers (stop the game's countdown timer for 14 seconds), and extra robots. Unlicensed. See also: *Exodus: Journey to the Promised Land* and *Joshua and the Battle of Jericho*.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

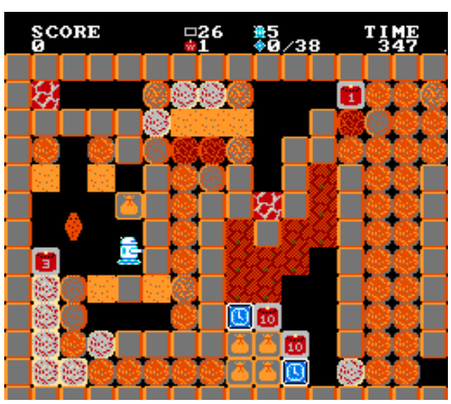
"The game is okay . . . robot is not that bad looking. He's the coolest part in the whole game . . . The music is incredibly irritating." —Twilight Foundry (twilightfoundry.com)

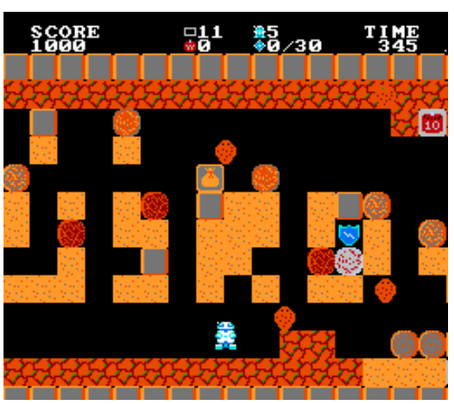
Notable Quotable:

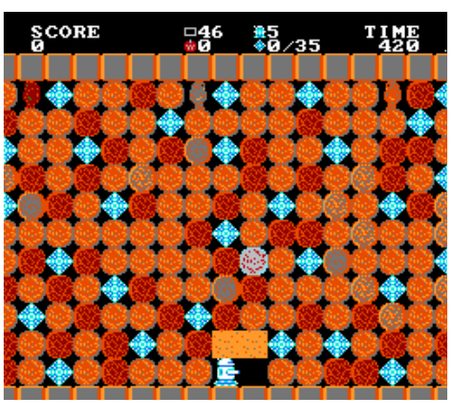
"This game is really, really fun. I absolutely recommend playing it . . . Aside from the music, there's really nothing bad about it . . .and that's from someone who hates Color Dreams . . . This almost redeems Color Dreams in a way." —stanburdman (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"A strange, fun little collect-a-thon from the guys who brought you *Sunday Funday*? Well . . .yeah! . . . There's something oddly appealing about collecting blue crystals in mine level after mine level . . . Yes, your weaponry is limited to a pea shooter and some aptly named TNT bombs, but dad blast it, the game works in an utterly simplistic way." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

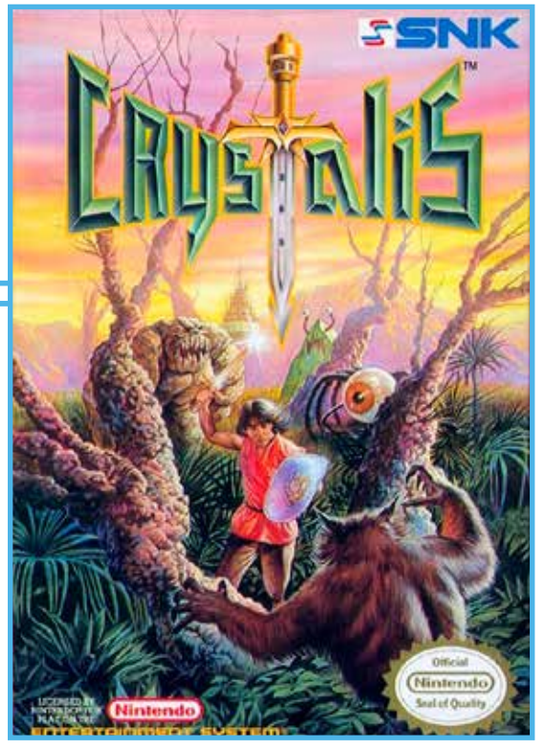






Crystalis

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



A hidden gem, *Crystalis* takes place 100 years after the Great War, when sorcery and magic had supplanted science and technology. The game stars a young magician seeking the land—Death Desert, Tower in the Sky, Wind Valley, Angry Sea, Mt. Sabre, and five other areas—for four elemental swords (wind, fire, water, and thunder), the combining of which will form a weapon capable of defeating the evil Draygon. Each sword can be powered up in various ways. Gameplay consists of killing enemies to gain experience and strength, communicating with townsfolk, visiting shops, solving puzzles, and acquiring shields, armor, rabbit boots (for jumping), fruit of Reeun (for removing a curse that turns the magician into a monster), thunder, x-ray goggles, keys, magic spells, and other tools, weapons, and power-ups. If you like *The Legend of Zelda* you should enjoy *Crystalis* as the two games have a lot in common.

OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Good control, fast movement, and fast gameplay. It has a conventional theme, but it is unique enough to still be worth the trip." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

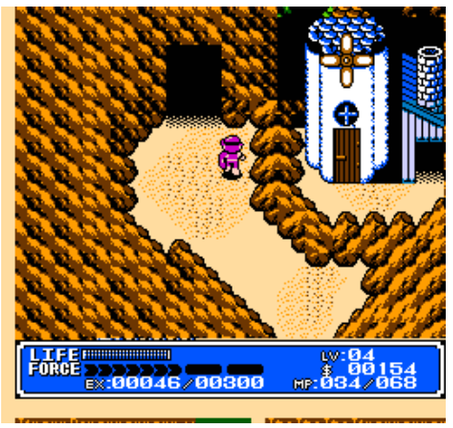
Notable Quotable:

"Bright and varied backgrounds help show the mood of the game . . . The people are large sprites that are capable of a surprising number of actions . . . Whenever you change your shield or sword, your character's appearance changes. Special moves and bosses are big and flashy . . . The music is wonderful, even by today's standards . . . There are many songs for each of the many different areas to explore . . . The plot is almost original, and it was built into the game perfectly . . . Movement is fast and responsive . . . Attacking is a little annoying due to the charge-up method." —RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Some people say that *Crystalis* is better than *The Legend of Zelda*. I say that those people drank too much Kool-Aid. While *Crystalis* is an excellent adventure/RPG, it does not measure up to the greatest adventure game of all-time. But the fact that it is even close tells you that it is an extremely fun game." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Insider Insight: *Crystalis* was the first role-playing game I ever played. One of my best friends had the game when we were kids, and I would watch him play it just about any time I'd go to his house. One day he finally let me play and I got to experience this amazing adventure on my own. I quickly became immersed in the game, and it has resonated with me to this day. In fact, it's easily among my top five NES games. It has everything you would want in an adventure game and more. If you haven't played it, what are you doing with your life? —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality



Cyber Stadium Series—Base Wars

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball/Futuristic, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991

In the twenty-fourth century, the skyrocketing cost of human athletes has led to mechanized baseball players. This futuristic take on America's favorite pastime follows standard rules of the game with two primary options: robot players, which are mono-colored and quite large, and battles for bases on force-out plays and close calls. The screen oftentimes scrolls slower than the ball moves, making for problematic fielding, but pitching is fun, since the player has full control of the ball after release. The robots, of which there are four types (Cyborg, Tank, Floater, and Motorcycle), can be upgraded with various guns, swords, special catches, and other useful items, but the battles are basic one-on-one button mashers featuring a close-up view. Battery backup lets you save pennant races and key stats, including league ranking, home run ranking, ERAs, and battle victories. Includes Team Edit mode.

Notable Quotable:

"Great pitching and batting action, fantastic graphics, and some of the best sports action you'll ever find." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1991)

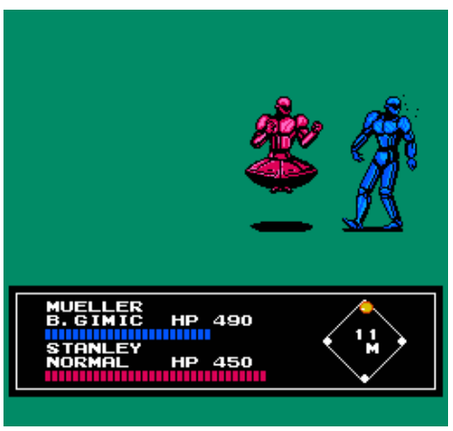
Notable Quotable:

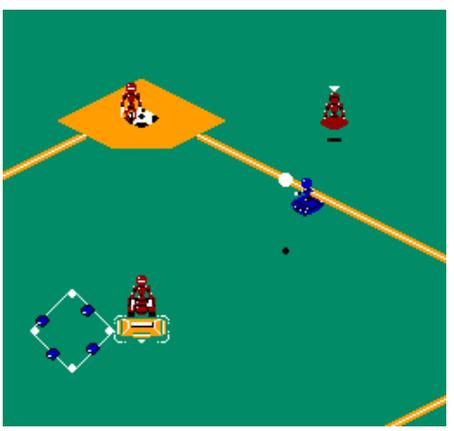
"Video baseball has never been especially thrilling: The basic rules are boringly familiar and you have only limited control of the players' actions. So it was with great hopes that I sat down to play *Cyber Stadium Series—Base Wars*, which features malevolent-looking robots . . . Then I discovered that, for all the science fiction details, what I had on my hands was essentially just another video baseball game. Aside from the mechanized players—who retain their novelty through the first couple of games—*Base Wars*' main innovation is that it requires hand-to-hand combat for possession of bases on force plays (though it doesn't happen that often in the average game) . . . Most of the time *Base Wars* plays just like a standard, respectable, human ball game—which is a shame." —*Entertainment Weekly* (June 21, 1991)

Insider Insight: When I was a kid *Base Wars* was one of my favorite sports titles. I rented the game several times because I loved it so much—there's nothing like playing futuristic baseball with a bunch of cyborgs. When I'd play against my friends, which was often, I would use the same strategy each time and they hated it. I would hit the ball, then just run the bases.

When a player tried to tag me out I'd have to fight for the base. Since I was better than most of my friends at fighting games I would usually win the battle and end up scoring. I would fight the other players so much that they'd end up exploding, and I would win the game because the other team would have to forfeit for not having enough players on the field. We had a blast and still talk about the game to this day. —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Cyberball

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: Tengen
GAME TYPE: Sports/Futuristic, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992

Cyberball for the NES gives players more than 100 offensive plays to choose from (along with 12 defensive formations) which is significantly more than found in Atari's original 1988 arcade game: a huge machine boasting four-player capability and two monitors. Unfortunately, the cast iron robot players are less detailed and the field has a flatter look. The game is overhead view, vertically scrolling, seven-on-seven football of the future (2022 to be exact) with rules that would make George Carlin proud. There are no penalties (field goals, punts, and fumbles have been removed as well) and the ball is a round, metallic bomb that will explode if the player fails to get a touchdown or cross the 50-yard line within a few downs. After you score a touchdown there's a conversion attempt where you can either pass or run. If you fail to get the ball into the end zone a laser-firing ship will destroy the offensive player nearest the ball. Crossing midfield and scoring points earns you money to purchase replacements for damaged players. There are four selectable teams: California Crush (balanced attack), Berlin Invasion (strong running game), New York Thunder (strong passing game), and Moscow Machine (strong passing game). You can play the game by yourself, versus another gamer, or two against the computer. There is no season mode.

Notable Quotable:

"The NES isn't able to handle the detailed graphics found in the arcade version of *Cyberball*, so this adaptation ironically ends up feeling more like a primitive version of football than a futuristic one." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are too haphazard, and sometimes it's tough to even hand off to a runner (the defense invariably picks off your laterals) . . .the computer adversary is fairly tough to beat. Two-player scrimmages are much more enjoyable . . .archaic graphic display—since the bomb/ball never bounces and there are no shadows there's no way to judge height. The music gets nerve-twinging, but the voices are moderately close to authentic. Overall, *Cyberball* isn't a disaster, but it could have been so much more." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

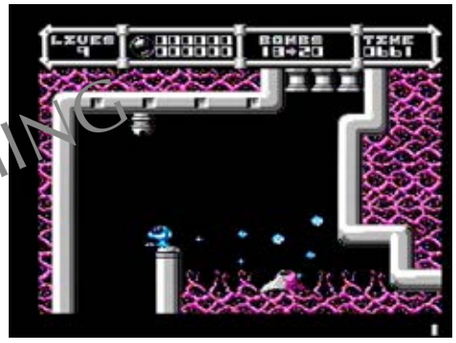
"I played this game with the hopes of fast-paced robotic fighting football. I felt like the only thing I got here was regular football, with sub-standard rules and players that sporadically 'blow up' to replace injuries . . . I wasn't impressed. The game is slow . . . Maybe they were just trying to portray robots as big, slow, metal objects, but what's the fun in that? Visually the game is also incredibly unappealing . . . At least *Base Wars* made the robots look damn cool and not like these pitiful sprites . . . It's not fun." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Cybernoid: The Fighting Machine

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Graphics
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

CYBERNOID
THE FIGHTING MACHINE
Grab the controls of Cybernoid—the ultimate fighting machine—and destroy the squadron of space pirates raiding the Earth's top-secret storage asteroids. It's up to you to stop the caterpillar death squads and other bizarre, organic life forms from stealing the precious cargo.
Blast your way forward—choosing from an incredible array of high tech weapons—like the ultra powerful, mega-explosive tracking bombs, rear-firing blasters and the invincible rotating shield balls.
Shoot first and ask questions later. If in doubt, annihilate all in your path!
· Both standard and state-of-the-art super sound effects!
· 3 challenging skill levels!
· Shoot 'em up, collect 'em up and maze-play action!
Akklaim



Adapted from the computer game of the same name, the notoriously difficult *Cybernoid* has players piloting a space fighter through three asteroid storage facilities, collecting cargo, resisting gravity, dodging obstacles, and blowing away such enemies as giant green blobs and caterpillar death squads. Each of the more than 150 rooms contains a time bomb, meaning timely exits are crucial. The space fighter, which can fly in all directions and shoot left and right, is equipped with a laser blaster, bombs, and genocide missiles, but you can also acquire shields, bouncers (which bounce off walls and destroy everything in their path), seekers (which hone in on ground installations), and a cybermace (which circles the ship). Gravity tugs at your ship when you're in flight.

Notable Quotable:
"Incredibly stupid-hard . . . I really like the graphics . . . The music is repetitive and gets irritating after a while . . . Sound effects are limited to a few exploding sounds, but sound more like something is splatting against a wall . . . I can't really recommend the game." —Tony Brasel (YouTube)

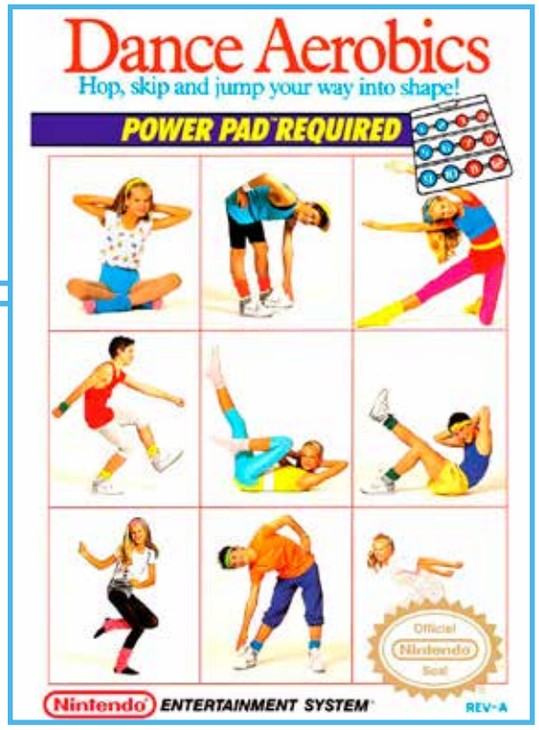
Notable Quotable:
"Phew. We've just finished playing a couple dozen rounds of *Cybernoid* and we're ready for a week's rest in a very quiet padded room. This is one tough space arcade game that requires learning some interesting strategies and skills you won't need for many other less challenging games." —*Ultimate Unauthorized Nintendo Game Strategies* – (Bantam Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"*Cybernoid* presents gamers with one of those frustratingly addictive 'I'll try it just one more time' scenarios that we all hate . . . I found the animation and graphics to be quite superb, even with a limited color palette . . . The music is of the standard chiptune variety, but features some decent layers and an appropriate composition considering the type of game . . .there are times when you will enter a screen and die almost instantly before you even get a chance to see what the hell is going on. This is a major flaw of the game design . . .hard on the easiest setting, but when the difficulty is set at its highest it becomes an insane sadomasochistic adventure." —Nerd Bacon (nerdbacon.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Dance Aerobics

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Bandai
GAME TYPE: Sports/Exercise, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Get off the couch, but don't go outside or turn off the TV. Rather play *Dance Aerobics*, which helps gamers keep physically fit by providing 12 stages of aerobic conditioning and 64 separate aerobic routines. The game is played via side B of Nintendo's Power Pad control mat—you touch the large circles on the mat with your hands and feet. The format is that of a dance studio class with eight levels of play—two apiece for each skill level: introductory, beginner, intermediate, and advanced. An onscreen female instructor wearing tights, leg warmers, and a headband leads gamers as they hop, stretch, bend, dance, and otherwise move to the music. The game works well as a personal aerobics instructor and is an excellent use of the Power Pad.

Memories: I still have my Power Pad on the top shelf of the storage racks in my game room. I should dust it off sometime and play *Dance Aerobics* and *World Class Track Meet*. I probably won't, but I should. An underrated and influential game, *Dance Aerobics*, which was released in Japan as *Aerobics Studio*, was a forerunner of such popular titles as *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Just Dance*.

Notable Quotable:

"Great . . .truly ahead of its time . . .occupies an interesting space in the NES library. It is a game that can be won or lost, yet it also belongs alongside home console 'productivity software' . . . It's a game that's useful, ostensibly . . .soundtrack is great: a real underrated gem." —No Bad Memories (nobadmemories.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The game does a great job of easing you into the action by slowly increasing the number of reps you're required to complete in each class, allowing you to build up stamina. The exercises aren't overly strenuous, but I like how the developers switched things up to target different body parts; for instance, there are some lessons that require you to hop and stretch out to the corners, as well as squatting or sitting. What's most impressive is how accurate the Pad is in terms of verifying the split second you lift your foot off the mat or place it down; there's zero lag and every movement registers perfectly . . .an unlikely hidden gem in the NES library." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

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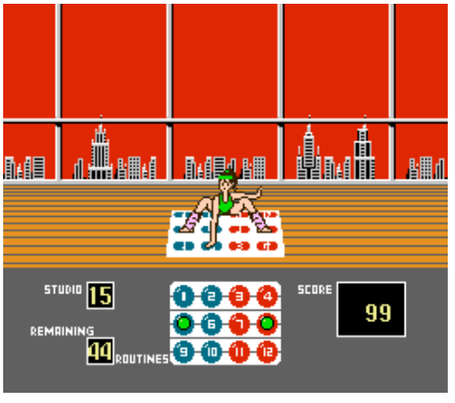
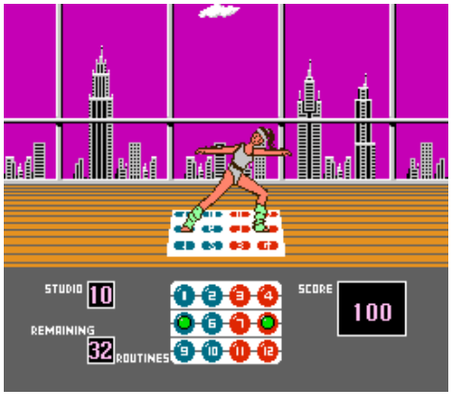
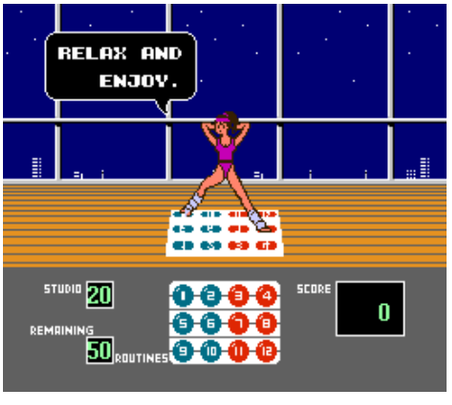
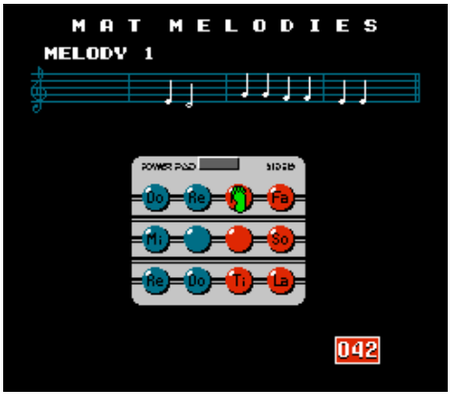


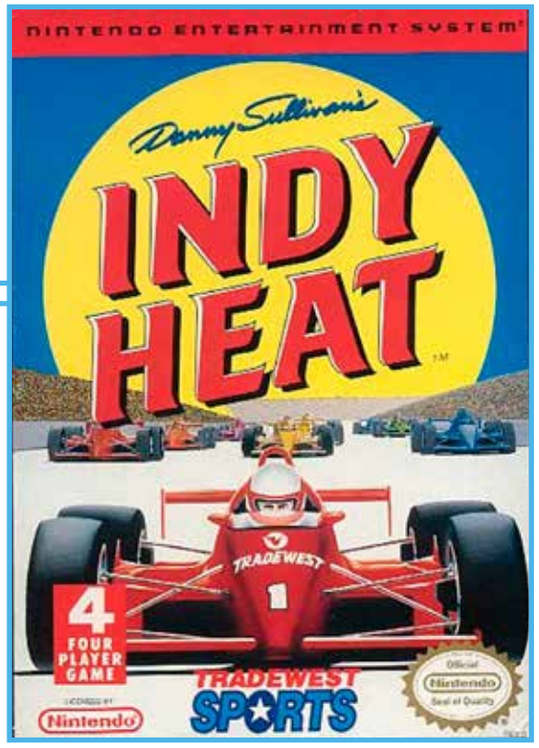






Danny Sullivan's Indy Heat

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



Despite poor sound effects and somewhat downgraded (though still very nice) graphics, *Danny Sullivan's Indy Heat* is a finely programmed port of Leland's three-player arcade game that featured a trio of steering wheels on the cabinet. Up to four gamers (via multi-tap adaptor) can race around nine different non-scrolling tracks: Western Canada, New Jersey, Southern California, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Eastern Canada, Colorado, and Tradewest Speed Bowl. A fifth car is always driven by Indy 500 champ (1985) Danny Sullivan. Winning

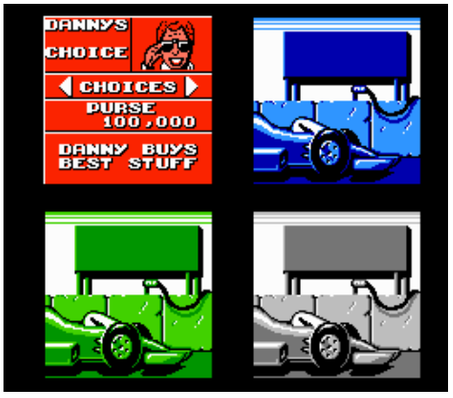
races grants players cash to purchase turbo boosts and better brakes, tires, engines, pit crew members (drivers occasionally pull over to refuel and douse engine fires), and miles per gallon. As in the similar *Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road*, the racing action is viewed from overhead. A brief but enjoyable old-school racer.

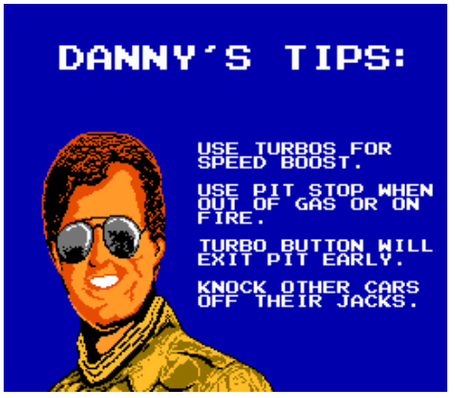
Notable Quotable:

"Very smooth and easy to play. You got a button for the gas, a button for the turbo, and a D-pad to steer. They are intuitive and responsive. When you lose a race, you lost it because you drove worse than the other drivers, not because you were a victim to poor controls . . . This is a fantastic NES title . . . Danny Sullivan should be proud to have his name on it." —Video Game Geek (videogamegeek.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Despite its small scale, *Indy Heat* boasts better visuals and more strategy than most NES racers . . . The tracks are rendered exceptionally well from an isometric point of view, giving them a distinct sense of depth . . . The controls are simple as can be, but there's plenty of strategy involved with timing your turbo boosts and using the pit stops in the most efficient manner. The tracks tend to be narrow, so there's a lot of bumping going on as you jockey for position. In the pit area, tiny crew members leap out to work on your car, which looks funny but impressive at the same time. This is one of the few games where pit stops really do make a difference! Between races you can easily and quickly use winnings to upgrade your vehicle. Expertly designed and programmed with care, *Indy Heat* sets the high water mark for old school racing fun." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

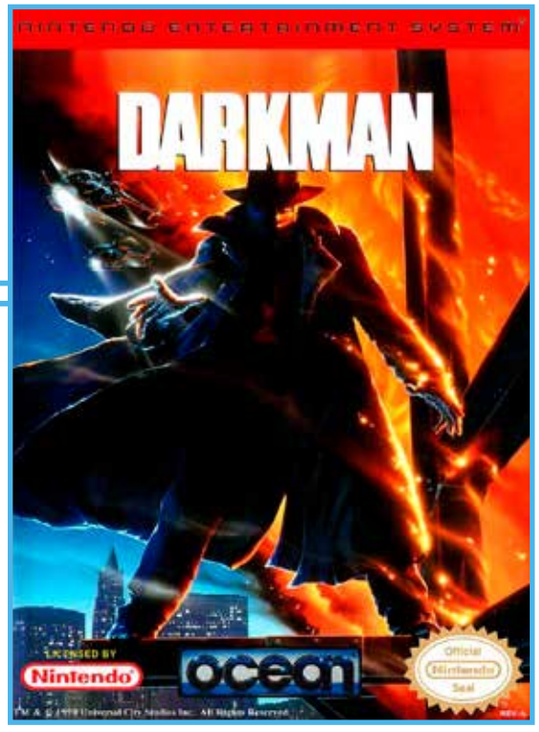



DANNY'S TIPS:
USE TURBOS FOR SPEED BOOST.
USE PIT STOP WHEN OUT OF GAS OR ON FIRE.
TURBO BUTTON WILL EXIT PIT EARLY.
KNOCK OTHER CARS OFF THEIR JACKS.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Darkman

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991



As disfigured scientist Peyton Westlake, a.k.a. Darkman, players run, jump, punch, and kick their way through an assortment of typical 8-bit platforming levels, including a warehouse, Central Park, a funhouse, Chinatown, and a partially constructed building. Darkman rides moving platforms, bounces on springs, swings on bars, climbs ladders, dodges rivets and spinning blades, walks across ledges and tightropes, hangs from a helicopter on a rope ladder, and more, including taking photos to create character masks that grant extended time to finish a stage (this is essentially a series of target shooting mini-games). Darkman can fire a gun, throw rocks, and hurl throwing stars, but the combat is weak, especially the tepid and frequently ineffectual punching and kicking (enemies include ninjas, construction workers, killer clowns, etc.). Platforming is sometimes brutally (not to mention unfairly) difficult, demanding pinpoint precision from the poor unfortunate player who is saddled with clunky, slippery controls. The graphics are pretty good and the levels are mercifully brief. Oddly enough, the first level seems to be the hardest, so stick with the game if you must to reach the other, more player-friendly stages. Based on Sam Raimi's 1990 movie of the same name.

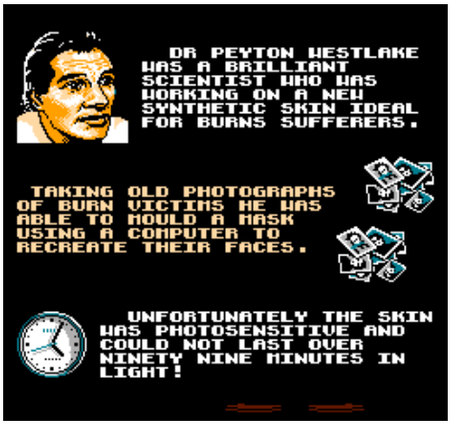
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

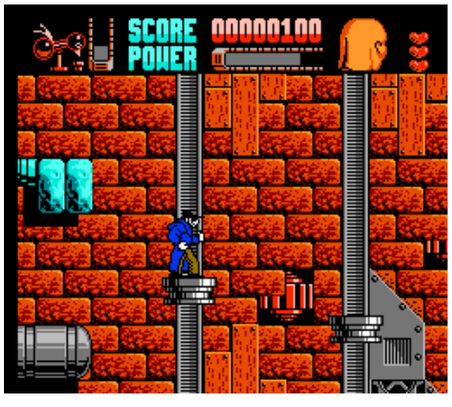
Notable Quotable:

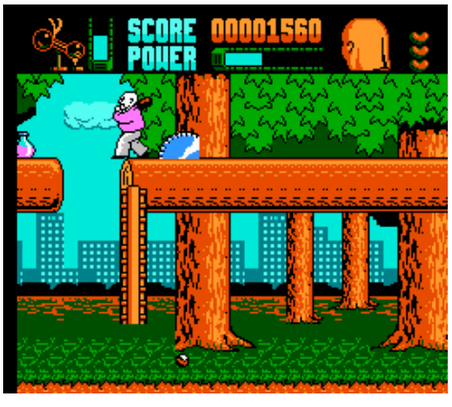
"An average cartridge . . . The game is really a poor man's version of *Batman* by Sunsoft. The graphics aren't as good and the controls are somewhat lacking. Still, it's a good game to play if you're a fan of the movie. One thing that will frustrate most gamers is the difficulty of level 1 . . .the rest of the game is a cakewalk." —*Digital Press* #3 (January/February 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The game is loaded with unfortunate platforming perils, demanding perfection to a fault . . . Jumping to collect a health power-up means you can't cling to the wall, forcing you to watch Darkman fly through what should be a solid wall . . . Darkman's punches and kicks don't look especially powerful, and it's not always clear when they are working . . . There are some ideas here that could have made for a fun game. I like the idea of taking other people's identity . . . Yet it seems to make no difference, as the bad guys attack you no matter what you look like. Why bother going to the trouble of creating a mask if everybody is going to see through it?" —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)


DR PEYTON WESTLAKE WAS A BRILLIANT SCIENTIST WHO WAS WORKING ON A NEW SYNTHETIC SKIN IDEAL FOR BURNS SUFFERERS.
TAKING OLD PHOTOGRAPHS OF BURN VICTIMS HE WAS ABLE TO MOULD A MASK USING A COMPUTER TO RECREATE THEIR FACES.
UNFORTUNATELY THE SKIN WAS PHOTOSENSITIVE AND COULD NOT LAST OVER NINETY NINE MINUTES IN LIGHT!





Darkwing Duck

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

Based on the Disney cartoon series, *Darkwing Duck* plays a lot like *Mega Man*, but the famous fowl can do three things Mega Man cannot: grab ledges, hooks, levers, and switches (for getting around easier and solving certain puzzles); use a cape as a shield (against weaker projectiles); and, fittingly enough, duck. Darkwing's gas gun he uses to battle enemies equips three types of ammo: heavy gas, which sends a shockwave across the floor; thunder gas, which releases two bolts of lightning; and arrow gas, which can be shot at walls to help Darkwing get past obstacles. He can only carry one secondary weapon at a time, so figuring out what works best where is a good strategy. His job is to gather gold and diamonds and defeat the Liquidator, Quackerjack, Wolfduck, and other F.O.W.L. agents. This surprisingly challenging game, which takes place at such locales as bridges, forests, sewers, and skyscrapers, meets Capcom's usual high standards of good gameplay and stellar graphics.

Notable Quotable:

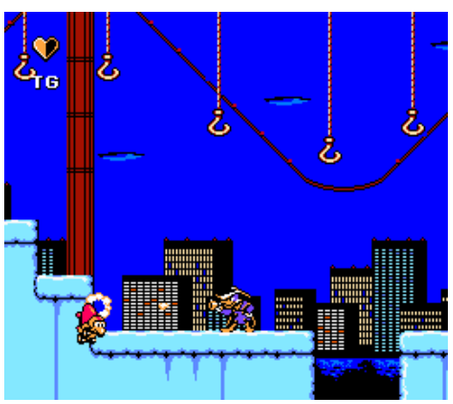
"Much like his Disney video game predecessors, Darkwing's cart is great 8-bit action entertainment. The gameplay's solid, and the challenge is set for intermediate gamers. A two-player option, like in *Chip 'n Dale*, would have been appreciated." —*GamePro* (May 1992)

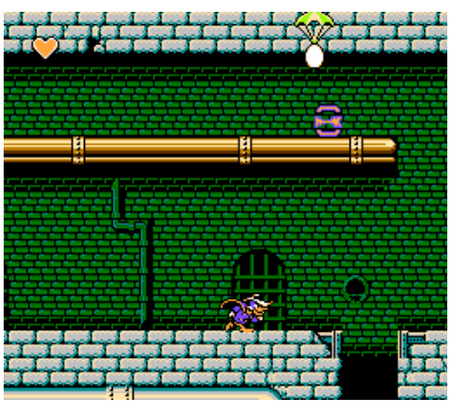
Notable Quotable:

"If you've worn out the Mega Man series, Darkwing Duck isn't a bad second choice… The frustration factor is high, unlike the pick-up-and-play Chip 'n Dale. If you enjoy games with a deep challenge factor, however, then this is certainly a game that should be on a must-play list." - Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight: Let's get dangerous! One of my favorite Disney cartoons back in the day was *Darkwing Duck*. Every time it would come on I'd grab a snack and rush to sit and enjoy the cartoony crime-fighting hijinks. It makes sense that eventually a video game inspired by the show would hit the NES—especially considering that Capcom and Disney could seemingly do no wrong at the time. I didn't even know they were making a *Darkwing Duck* game until I saw it at the store. This was one of the few occasions I can remember asking my dad to buy me a game on a whim and him actually doing so—I was one happy kid that day! It was so fun playing as Darkwing, seeing him and other familiar characters come to life in glorious 8-bit. I never beat it back then, but as an adult I've played through countless times. Yes, it's basically *Mega Man* with a Disney flare, but is that really a bad thing? —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Dash Galaxy in the Alien Asylum

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

An unusual mix of puzzler and platformer, *Dash Galaxy* casts players in the role of a fearless space explorer on a distant planet trying to make it back to his ship. The level begins in an overhead-view elevator shaft with the player entering rooms by passing through doorways, some of which are blocked by forcefields or blocks. Blocks can be rearranged, and both forcefields and blocks can be blown up with bombs. Once the player is inside a room play switches to a side-view perspective, with Dash running and climbing slowly (but certainly not dashingly) and jumping awkwardly on platforms and trampolines as he turns off switches and avoids aliens. Touching enemies will deplete Dash's oxygen, which acts like a health bar. Along the way the player can grab keys, bombs, detonators, stars, oxygen, and other useful items, some of which you'll definitely need in the top-down areas. Dash also rides hover pads. The game has two distinct play styles, but neither is terribly exciting. The puzzle sections, which are competent, will bore action fans, while the platforming scenes are slow and sluggish, as though our hero is affected by a lack of gravity. The graphics are also flat, with dull backgrounds and small characters.

Notable Quotable:

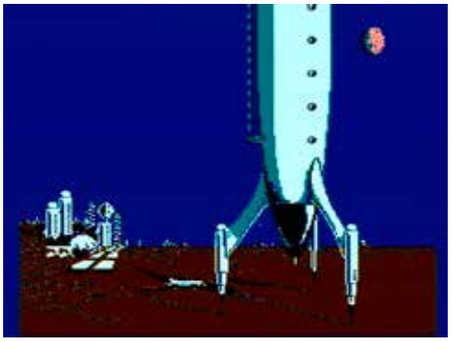
"Dash Galaxy's mobility in this game is much more akin to trying to run through oatmeal, so keeping the enemies from touching you isn't always easy . . . Dash Galaxy is pointlessly exploring his rocket ship and Nintendo has decided to drag you along for the ride . . .the music can't possibly have been made by anyone other than some kid who's just got their first keyboard." —Zack Huffman (gamecola.net)

Notable Quotable:

"A strange cross between a platformer and a puzzle game . . . Having two distinct types of challenges is theoretically a plus, but the platform sections of *Dash Galaxy* are lame. Dash runs and jumps awkwardly, and the sluggish controls make the levels seem more like work than play. The puzzles are decent because logic is required to solve them, but none stand out as overly clever or inventive." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

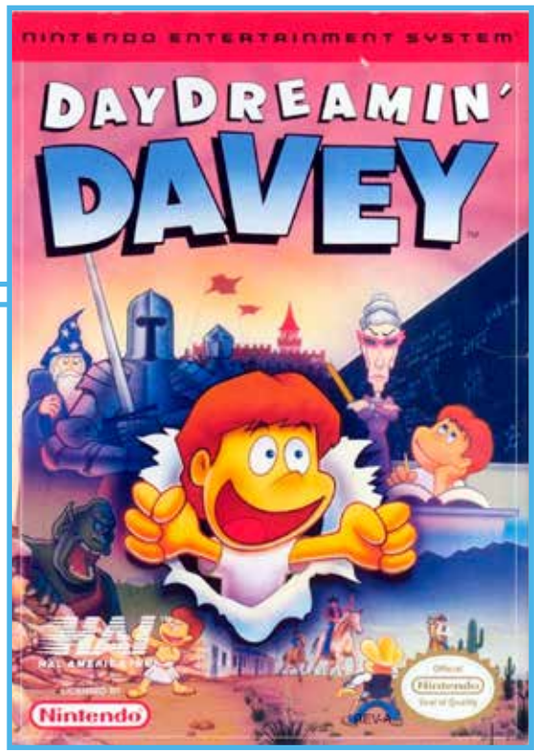
"It's definitely one you can sit and play through from start to finish, but I can't guarantee you'll love every minute of it. I'd basically expect you to lose patience about halfway through and start playing something much better . . . There's a sense that most of the effort went into coming up with an eye-catching title and some awesome cover art, but very little effort went into actually making a good game. Which is a shame, since there was a promising puzzle game in there somewhere." —Adam Ezagouri (www.1morecastle.com)



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Day Dreamin' Davey

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Using the greatest time machine in history—his imagination—Davey goes on a journey through three distinctive top-down worlds: Medieval, Greek Mythology, and Western. Each world has thematic enemies, such as knights, gnomes, satyrs, bats, rattlesnakes, buzzards, and gunslingers and/or sharpshooters, and each has era-appropriate melee and projectile weaponry for Davey to use: swords, spears, bows and arrows, rifles, shotguns, and the like. Other items to purchase or trade for include ammo, shields, snake elixir, a grappling hook (for crossing a bridge), magic potions, fairy dust (for invincibility), sundials (for stopping time), and more. To reach airborne enemies or make it past rocks and other obstacles Davey can jump (you must press A and B at the same time). Certain characters, such as nymphs, which leave apples, and the sheriff, who gives you money, provide limited assistance. In the Old West there are first-person "quick draw" mini-games where you must shoot the gun out of the bad guy's hands by guiding a cursor with the control pad or using the Zapper light gun. Some strategy is involved in *Day Dreamin' Davey* as specific items are required to beat certain enemies and Davey must find a specific item to complete each level.

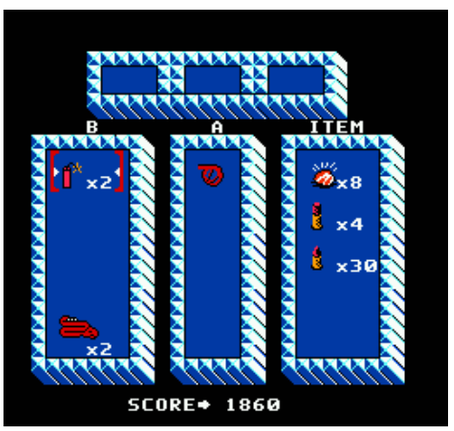
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"The plot consists of a pointless series of events in Davey's school life . . .a *Zelda* clone where you collect items, slaughter random enemies, wander through lackluster environments, then awaken, only to move to the next scenario and do it all over again. Perhaps if Davey could stay awake for more than five minutes at a time his daydreams—indeed his life—would be more interesting." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

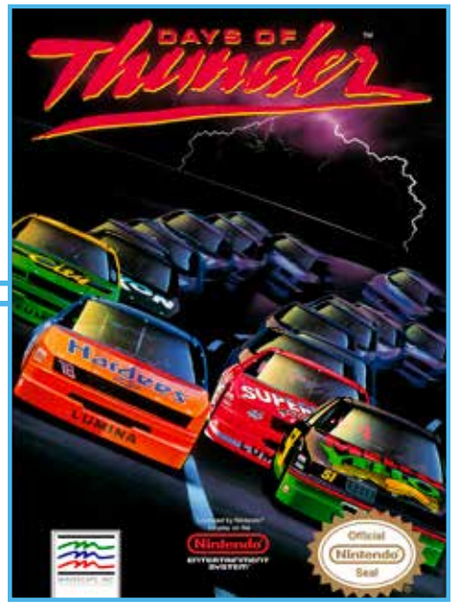
Notable Quotable:

"Boring. It plays out like a very poor man's *Zelda* . . .the levels offer nothing particularly interesting nor complex, just these lame fetch quests and sometimes stuff to whack so I can find the item . . . Pretty much everything about this game is mediocre . . . It drags on and on and on, never picking up at any point as you continually fetch items in an overly linear corridor and then head to Point B to deliver said item to an NPC so that you can proceed and maybe fight a boss . . . Its boring gameplay, juxtaposed by boring, slow-paced music, is enough to make you want to daydream about playing a better game." —Neo Seeker (www.neoseeker.com)



Days of Thunder

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Stock Car Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Based on the 1990 feature film starring Tom Cruise, *Days of Thunder* pits rookie driver Cole Trickle against 15 other drivers (including Rowdy Burns and Russ Wheeler) in an eight-race series cup beginning at Daytona Beach, followed by races at Atlanta, Talladega, Dover, Pocono, Michigan, and Phoenix. Finally, the big showdown takes you back to Daytona Beach. In Series Cup, you must run four qualifying laps by yourself on each track to determine your starting position. To perform well in the game you must master side-slamming (bumping into and cutting off other cars), slipstreaming (getting dragged along in a fast-moving car's wake), and making use of the pipeline (the perfect path through the banked corners). Plus there's a pit crew (viewed from overhead), meaning you have direct control over refueling, changing tires, and repairing the engine and the fuel tank (your car is equipped with a damage

indicator). This is a difficult (if nice looking) racer that casual gamers should avoid.

Notable Quotable:

"The intro's okay, but the rest of the game is a total drag—duff sprites juddering around naff tracks to the sound of thousands of angry bees . . .could have been quite entertaining given the amount of scope available, but quite frankly, this follows in the movie's footsteps—straight down the loo . . .how this could ever merit Nintendo's seal of approval is utterly beyond me." —*Computer and Video Games* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The ambitious polygons and camera angles of the 16-bit versions were never possible on the 8-bit NES, so the game has been totally redesigned . . . You now view from behind Cole Trickle's car . . . It gives the effect of one of those LCD games where the main object moves across a fixed background—fortunately, it moves in a much smoother and eye-pleasing way, and also makes it more of a game than the simulation of the 16-bit versions. Controls are a little difficult to get used to . . .exceptionally well presented . . .one of the better race games on the NES . . . An accurate game that captures the action and speed of the film." —*Raze* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

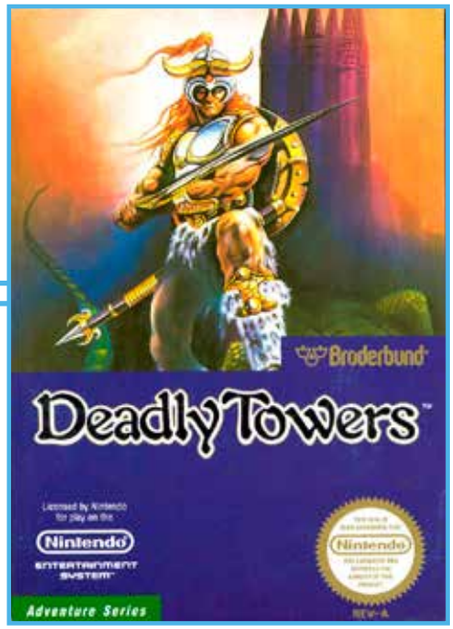
"Although the *Days of Thunder* film was utter rubbish, I thought that the fast, car-crashing action could be turned into a really good Nintendo game. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be, and what we've got instead is one of the dullest racing games I've seen on a console. Not only is the speed of the action slow, the tracks are the most boring you're ever likely to race around—they're oval and only have left turns. There are no crashes during the game and all the cars seem to move at the same speed– so there's no whizzing around overtaking people . . .a horribly tedious game that gets terminally boring after you've given it just a few goes." —*Mean Machines* (May 1991)

OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: I've never cared about car racing. I get why people like it, but it's never done anything for me. And I've always had a "take it or leave it" attitude about racing games. Outside of *Outrun*, *Rad Racer*, and *R.C. Pro-Am*, I really didn't care about them. So I still don't understand why, when my friend Troy left his copy of *Days of Thunder* at my house, I felt the need to try to beat it. It was annoying that I actually had to pay attention to changing tires, refueling, and having work done on my engine. Oh, and that I had to control my pit crew while doing it all. I did appreciate that there were different race tracks, but ultimately it was just taking a bunch of left turns, just at different intervals for each track. Also, the fact that there was no music playing during the races was boring—just the engine and collision sound effects. If someone were into NASCAR I could see how they might enjoy it, as it's essentially an NES NASCAR simulator, but it just wasn't for me. However, after playing the game I finally did watch the movie one night when it was on HBO, so I guess they got me there.
—John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

Deadly Towers

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software
DEVELOPER: Lenar
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



Ambitious in concept and unusual in execution, *Deadly Towers* has players controlling Prince Myer, who must climb and explore seven maze-like bell towers, remove the bells (each of which are guarded by a boss), and burn down the towers. Climbing is done on ladders and stairs, and as you reach every other story of a tower, you can walk around in each of the directions on that floor. Myer is outfitted with a projectile-firing short sword that can shoot in four directions, and he can upgrade his weapon several times for battling an assortment of enemies, including bats, sparks, devils, slime creatures, and flying demons. The most powerful primary weapon is Splendor, a golden sword of legend. Other power-ups and helpful items include shields, helmets, double shot (which lets players shoot two swords), armor, warps, green crystals (which freeze the monsters), blue necklaces (for invincibility), green drinks (which restore 200 hit points), magic keys, and hyper boots (for climbing stairs faster), among others.

Notable Quotable:
"The most complicated of all Nintendo games, *Deadly Towers* will provide *months* of entertainment . . .and frustration. It's very easy to die in this game. Though the graphics are weak, the musical themes for each level are entrancing!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Stands proud as one of the highlights in the history of bad game design . . . Battle becomes virtually impossible once the screen starts filling with more and more monsters . . . Dungeons are collections of anywhere from sixty to two hundred nearly identical cramped rooms . . . Navigating them requires making a map by hand, keeping track of which rooms contain pleasant shopping, and which kill you as soon as you enter . . .graphics are basic." —Andrew DeMario (www.rpgfan.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Few games are as unplayable as *Deadly Towers* . . . Our hero has little health, moves at a snail's pace (while enemies can move across the screen in an instant), and his only means of attack is by throwing swords (which he has a limitless supply of), with only one sword able to be thrown at a time . . .beyond confusing . . .there's no map to speak of, so you're just going from one garish room to another, hoping you're making some kind of progress . . .you often can't tell what is and isn't a doorway to another room . . . The enemies are an uninspired assortment of blobs, orbs, and generic spider and bat monsters." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: In 1987, I was still rocking it old school with my Atari 2600. All my friends had upgraded to the NES, but my parents were of the mindset that I "already have a video game system and don't need another one." So when I wanted to play the NES I always had to go over to someone else's house. It sucked, but those were the breaks.

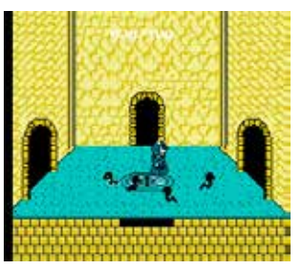
My mother and I were visiting one of her friends, and I knew her son, Jeff. He took me to their family room to show me the new Nintendo Entertainment System he'd received as a gift. He had a few games already, but one stood out: *Deadly Towers*. The name sounded mysterious, the box art reminded me of the cover of a Conan novel, and I immediately began fantasizing of what a *Dungeons & Dragons* video game would look like.

Jeff, on the other hand, wasn't thrilled that I wanted to try it out. "It's, like, really stupid" was basically his response. I insisted that we play it and he complied in an attempt to be a good host.

Boy howdy was he ever right. *Deadly Towers* was absolute trash. Cryptic, confusing, difficult as all hell . . .it sucked on every conceivable level. As I attempted to play it, and failed miserably, Jeff audibly groaned when I'd receive a "Game Over" and frustratingly start again.

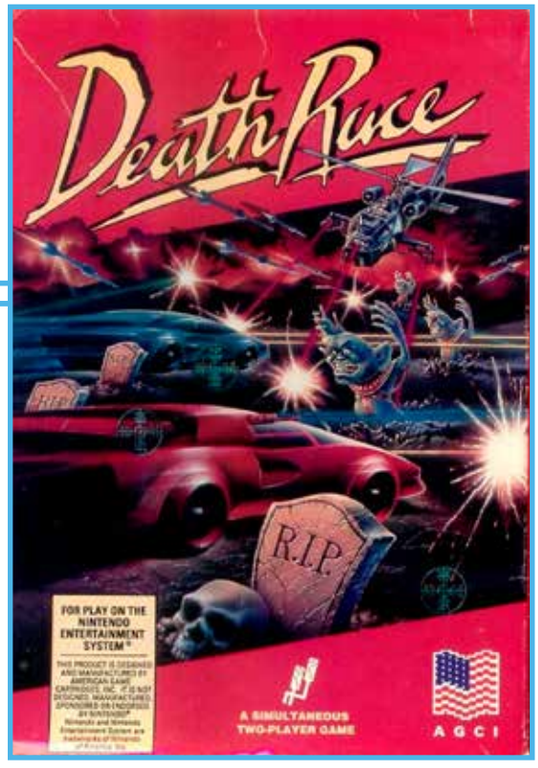
Eventually Jeff had enough and removed the game from the NES. "How about we play a good game?" he asked. He then popped in *Super Mario Bros.* and we played that for the remainder of the afternoon.

Deadly Towers feels like it was thrown together to make a quick buck from the Nintendo craze of the time, despite the freaking fantastic cover. Sadly, the game itself is not representative of that excellent painting in the slightest. And yet there is a copy of it in my collection. Why? I guess I'm nostalgic about a craptastic video game. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker, and Gamer



Death Race

PUBLISHER: American Game Cartridges
DEVELOPER: American Game Cartridges
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Death Race for the NES is somewhat similar to Exidy's controversial arcade game of the same name from 1976: both are viewed from an overhead perspective; both refer to the people you run over as "gremlins"; and both offer two-player simultaneous action. The cult coin-op classic, which does benefit from steering wheel control, has black-and-white graphics, no pit stops, no visible roadways, and no shooting mechanism. In the NES game, players can fire a machine gun and missiles at the pedestrians, and at silos and other vehicles. The NES version also lets players capture flags (before the timer expires) and purchase special guns, tires, engines, chassis, and missiles. As you drive around the screen, you'll be chased by heat-seeking missiles and helicopters that shoot at you. The objective is to locate all the flags and then find the exit on the border wall. Loosely based on *Death Race 2000* (1975), the infamous B-movie starring Sylvester Stallone and David Carradine. Unlicensed and rare.

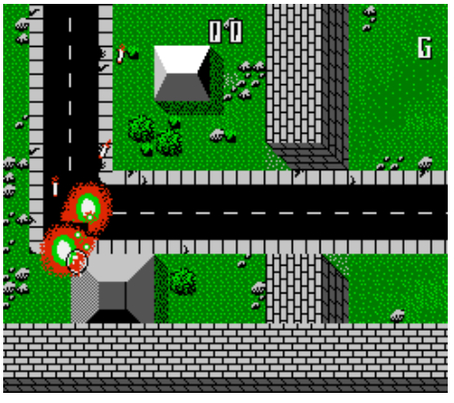
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"This is awesome in a really awful way . . .running over the bodies of innocent pedestrians . . .control is not good, but it's definitely not the worst I've experienced in an overhead-view driving game. Most of the time you just get lucky when you run people over. Physically aiming your vehicle and rushing toward one normally won't work because they'll get out of the way. Controls don't allow for quick directional correction. Often you'll even find yourself driving in circles around one guy . . . I'm having a considerable amount of fun with this game . . . It's entertaining to a degree . . .will give you some good laughs." —The Retro Demon (YouTube)

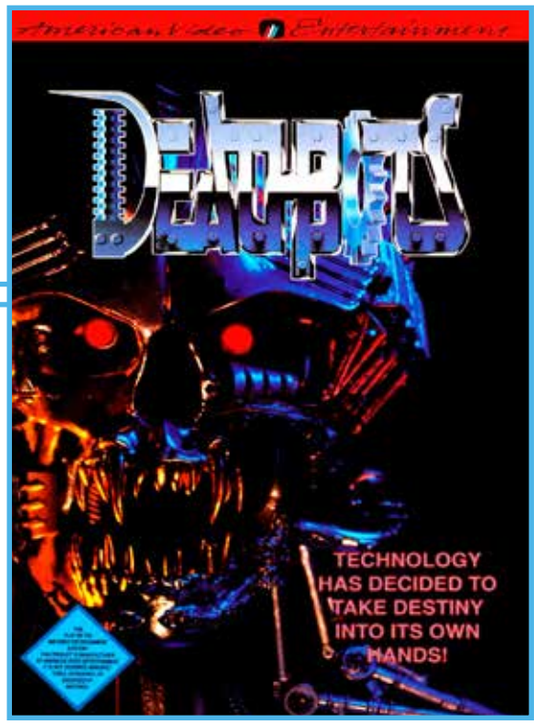
Notable Quotable:

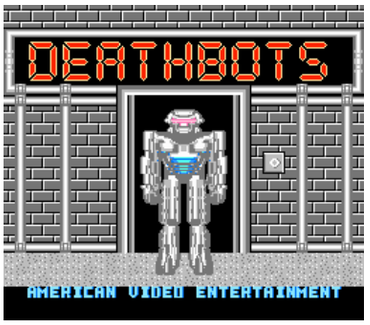
"*Death Race* is what you get when you combine *Gran Turismo*, *Twisted Metal*, and the original *Grand Theft Auto* for your NES. Once you wrestle with the controls a bit (you move by pressing up on the D-pad) and get the hang of your death mobile, you'll wonder why you had never heard of this game before . . .use the money it gives you in the beginning to upgrade your car wisely . . .I recommend upgrading the speed, your guns, and strapping some missiles to your rig . . . The more collateral damage, the more money you get, and the more death your vehicle can bring. Nothing else matters in this game. If it moves, kill it." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

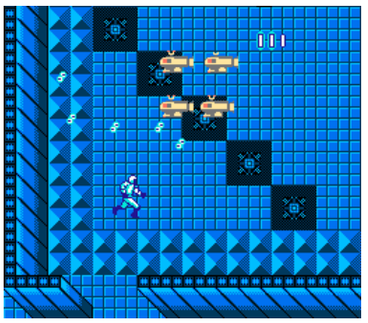


Deathbots

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Odyssey Software
GAME TYPE: Maze Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990







Viewed from a top-down perspective, *Deathbots* has you guiding a man in a battle suit through a labyrinthine, eight-level gamma base, with the ultimate goal of [illegible]oying a powerful bomb deep underg[illegible]. As you work your way through various corridors, walking over floor pads to open doors, robots (which fire at you a lot), genetically engineered creatures, flying sentinels, and other enemies will attack. To ward off the baddies, you are armed with a handgun and can acquire such weaponry as a laser pistol, a laser rifle, a blaster pistol, and hand grenades, which you can equip and use via a selection screen. You can also acquire shield belts and power packs. Mines should be avoided, while transporters, which look similar to mines, transport players to new locations. The game has a uniform (i.e. redundant) industrial look and is marred by poor programming. Unlicensed and hard to find.

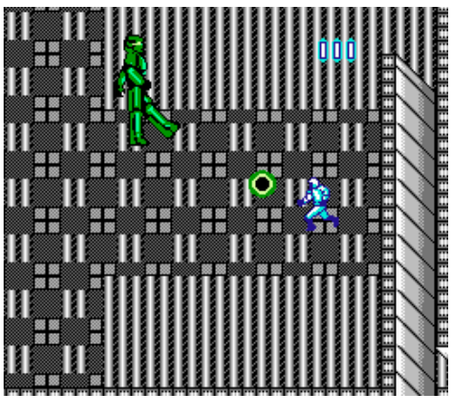
OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

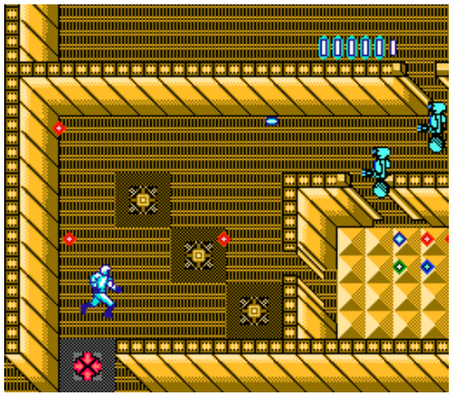
Notable Quotable:

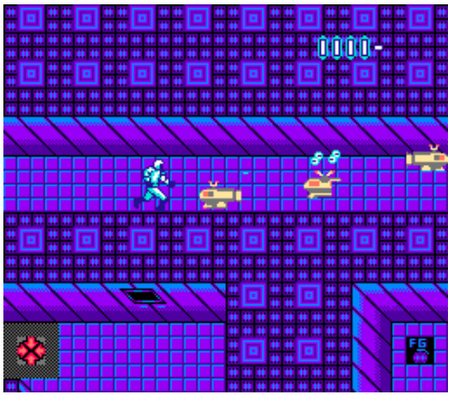
"It is a shame and a tragedy that a better team was not able to flesh out the *Deathbots* concept into a grander, more wonderful experience. The inventory management, world scale, and other elements of this game had real potential . . . But when eight robots are firing at you from down the hall and you cannot get the stupid door to open the frustrations tend to outweigh the positives." —NintendoLegend (nintendolegend.com)

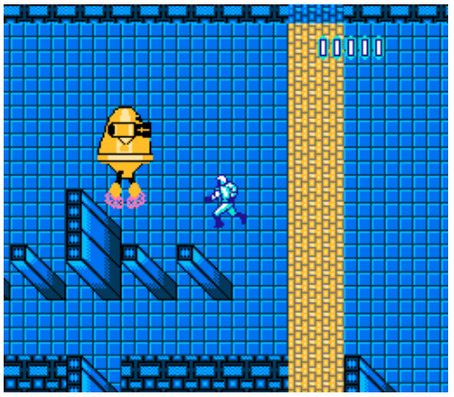
Notable Quotable:

"There's plenty to at least try and appreciate about *Deathbots*. It's a game that has the right idea and its heart is in the right place; it's just that the overall execution is below par and the fun factor is extremely low. It's novel for all of ten seconds before it gets dull and tedious to play through. It doesn't really have any style to it, with its dull silver spaceship interiors and non-descript robot and alien designs, and a soundtrack that's put together by a composer randomly pressing notes until something semi-melodic and vaguely sci-fi comes out of the process." —Neo Seeker (www.neoseeker.com)



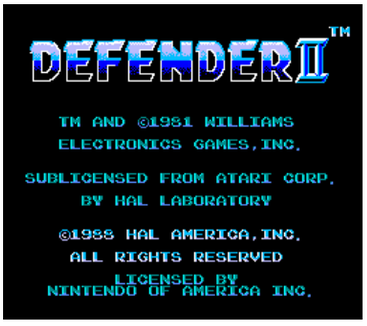






Defender II

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1988



A hardcore side-scroller with hectic shooting action, *Defender II* handles well and looks pretty good, but it's absent a number of things found in Williams' *Stargate* (1981) classic arcade game upon which it is based. (*Stargate* was the sequel to *Defender*, and most home versions of *Stargate* were called *Defender II*.) Missing features include hyperspace, the Inviso cloaking device, Yllabian Dogfight waves, and Firebomber Showdown waves. Strangely, when you rescue a resident (humanoid) it is no longer necessary to return him or her to the planet's surface, making the game easier than the original. Also, you can no longer shoot them while they are on the ground (they shouldn't be shot, but this version removes the possibility). In *Stargate* the planet explodes if all the innocents are killed, but that explosion never happens here. Like NES *Joust*, *Defender II* introduces music (which sounds a bit like the *Star Wars* theme) where there was none before. The side-scrolling, wraparound gameplay has you piloting a ship back and forth over a mountainous planet, shooting laser beams (left and right) at aliens, and rescuing humanoids that appear along the ground before they can be carried off by enemies and turned into mutants. You can unleash a limited number of smart bombs that destroy all onscreen enemies and enter a warp gate (which appears as a sparkling square) that will send you instantly to the other side of the planet.

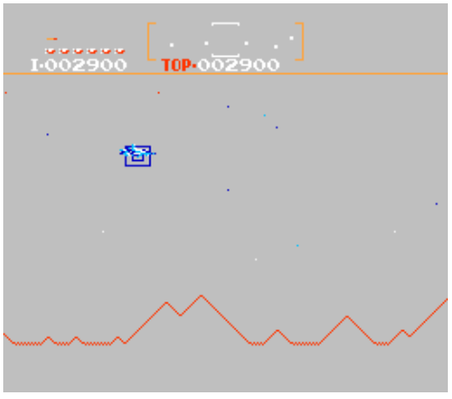
Memories: No matter how many times I play *Defender II* (or *Defender* or *Stargate*) I never seem to get any better. It's a fine shooter, but I just can't seem to monitor the action well enough to rescue the hostages before the enemies fly off with them. I'm probably about average skill-wise at the game—it's a toughie.

Notable Quotable:
"It's painfully difficult, and *Defender* fans would have it no other way . . .such a wonderful game . . .awesome . . .a game you definitely want." —CGR Publishing (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"This is a good-looking translation, but many key features are missing . . .tends to be too fast, making it difficult to avoid collisions, especially when changing direction . . .makes me want to play the original *Defender*." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

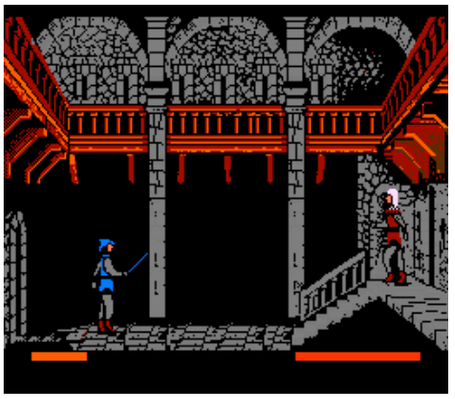
Notable Quotable:
"There are so many different enemies that you'll have to take care of throughout all the levels that each stage feels like a whole new challenge. You've got Landers who try to capture the humans and blast you out of the sky. Then you've got the Baiters who zig-zag around the screen and basically try to suicide run into you. There's Bombers that launch stationary air mines, or Pods that explode into tiny little mini alien fighters . . . Much more entertaining than just one or two simple ships that fire at you . . .proves its worth and stands the test of time . . .visually there's absolutely nothing to it." —Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Defender of the Crown

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



To reclaim the crown and conquer the heart of a beautiful maiden play *Defender of the Crown*, which is a graphically simplified port of the Amiga computer game (1986). The action takes place in England in 1149 AD, and you play as one of four Saxon knights, each rated according to leadership, jousting, and swordplay. The objective is to acquire land through conquests, jousting, and morning star tournaments. You will read maps, raid and defend castles, plunder enemy strongholds, engage in sword fights, duel for gold needed to build an army, capture unguarded territories, move through friendly lands, and strategically place knights, soldiers, and catapults (catapult ammo includes boulders, fire, and disease). You'll even team up with Robin Hood from time to time on your quest to avenge King Richard's murder.

SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

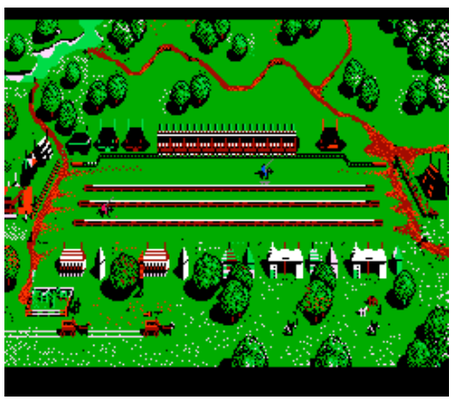
"*DOTC* was an interesting computer game that successfully paired beginner level wargaming with some of the most vivid graphics around. The NES version, however, lacks the sharp visuals of the original, and what we end up with is a slow-moving cart that will appeal to diehard wargamers only . . . It's slow, dull, and boring . . .too difficult for the average player." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1989)

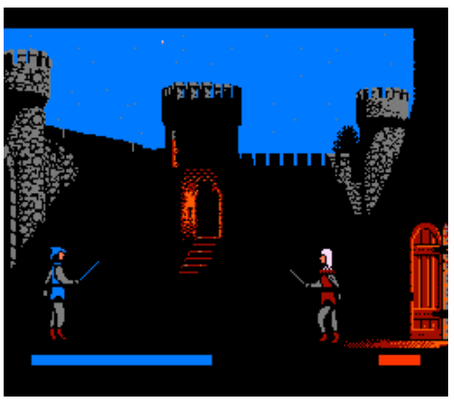
Notable Quotable:

"Give the Ultra people credit for trying to do a video game version of classic board games like *Risk* and *Castle Risk*. The problem here is that while looking at the map and distributing your armies is a diverting strategic challenge, the battles themselves are much too pedestrian . . . Very good animation . . . A few okay sound effects, but the music should have been more stirring and/or medieval." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games III* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

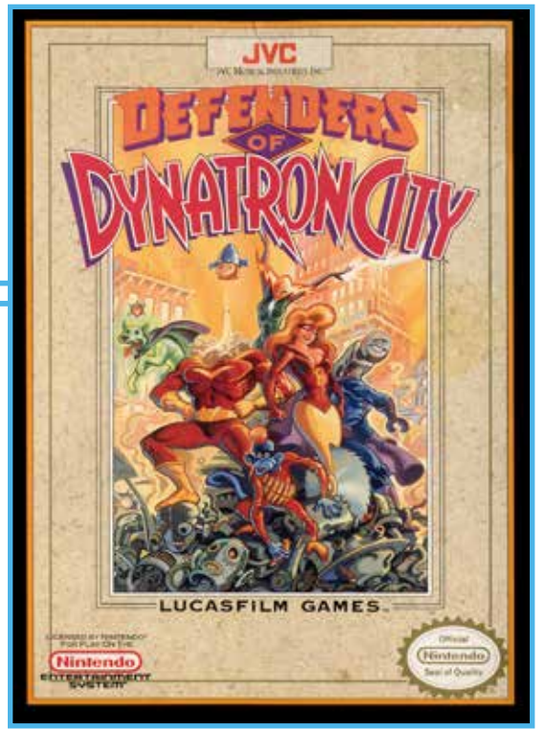
"While *Defender of the Crown* is quite good fun to play, you leave it wanting more. The arcade-style screens are neat, and the strategy part is simple enough to let a facts 'n figures dumbo like me enjoy it without getting bogged down, but there's just not enough to keep you entertained. The game is fairly challenging, but again, not really enough to make it good value for the money. With the benefit of some additions like extra arcade sequences and a more complex strategy element this could have been really good . . .it's a fairly enjoyable, but ultimately unsatisfying game." —*Mean Machines* (December 1991)





Defenders of Dynatron City

PUBLISHER: JVC
DEVELOPER: Lucasfilm Games
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Introducing an original superhero team to the NES and the world at large, *Defenders of Dynatron City* lets gamers play as one of six different characters, each with different styles of attack, damage tolerance, and powers: Buzzsaw Girl (blade, somersault attack); Monkey Kid (banana bombs); Jet Headstrong (fly, throw cars, fire head-like rocket); Ms. Megawatt (run fast, throw lightning bolts); Radium Dog (atomic bite, throw cars, dog paddle through the air); or a robot named Toolbox (hammerhead smash, spring jump). The heroes battle through The Streets of Dynatron City, Mega Mall, The Sewers, and Proto-Cola Factory, ending up in a face-off against Dr. Mayhem. You can purchase and find such helpful items as food and character specific power-ups, and a compass and map help you navigate through the various areas. The action sounds good on paper, and the heroes are colorful and fun, but poor collision detection makes fighting enemies (robosaurs, mutated monsters, and the like) frustratingly difficult, ruining the experience. Despite its deficiencies (including a strict time limit), *Defenders of Dynatron City* spawned an animated Fox TV special and a six-issue Marvel comic book series.

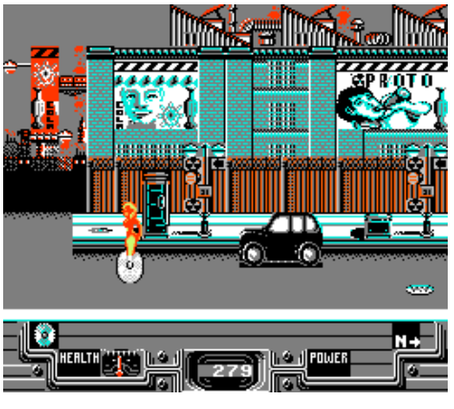
Notable Quotable:
"If you want a taste of the what a game shouldn't be, *Defenders of Dynatron City* is it!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"A very disappointing release from a company that should know better. Avoid at all costs." —*Nintendo Magazine System* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The freedom allowing you to toggle between heroes is nice, but the actual experience of beating up robots and mutants is dull and repetitive. The visuals are better than average but lack the detail to fully depict what seem like creative characters and villains." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

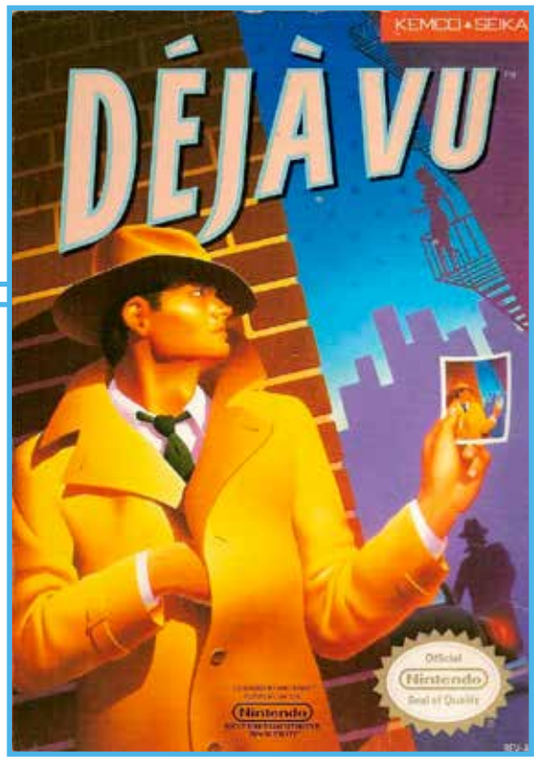
Notable Quotable:
"The variety of superhero powers in this game is commendable, but you may long for your own super powers to master these superheroes. Speed and agility are not a *Defender* forte. Your thumbs and patience will get a major workout as you try to catch up to the robots. Also, you have to be in the perfect position to score a hit with your super powers, and you'll have a tough time finding it . . .plenty of places to explore . . . Obviously a tremendous effort was put into the graphic details of Dynatron's architecture and its inhabitants. However, they lack the punch to pop off the screen and grab your attention. The tunes aren't bad, though they sound suspiciously similar to those heard in that video blast from the past, *Maniac Mansion*." —*GamePro* (June 1992)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Déjà Vu

PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Kemco
GAME TYPE: First-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



This point-and-click adventure is literally a journey of self-discovery. As the game begins, you wake up groggy in a bar restroom stall in 1940s Chicago, with blood on your right hand and a puncture mark on your left arm, where it looks like you might have been injected with something. Worst of all, you have no idea who you are. You must figure out what happened, which involves moving a cursor around the screen to go to various areas of the city, selecting from a list of commands (open, examine, take, move, use, hit) and interacting with any number of objects, including doors, mirrors, prescription drugs, a slot machine, a mugger, elevators, a taxi cab, and much more. The cursor moves slowly and the view of the action is limited to one-fourth of the screen, but gathering clues, solving puzzles, and piecing together the story is both challenging and interesting.

Based on the 1987 computer game *Deja Vu: A Nightmare Comes True!!*, which featured mouse control.

Notable Quotable:

"I can't believe how much stuff this game got away with. I don't know of any other game that actually allows you to go through with suicide via a .38 magnum. I also can't believe that searching the inside of the toilet is an option . . .full of sarcastic wisecracks . . .has music that really sets the stage, as well as decent graphics for a point-and-click game . . .one of the best RPG-style games on the NES. It is similar to *Shadowgate* and *The Uninvited*, but since it is rooted in the real world it is a lot easier to solve. If you like humor, violence, and RPGs then you need to go out and pick this game up immediately." —NES Archives (formerly at nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"When you get stuck, it's usually because you're looking for something that's small and easily missed, or because you haven't figured out the right way to get the item using the game's commands. The story in the NES version is very similar to that of the PC version, although it has been adapted slightly . . . The game has colorful graphics and a good sense of humor, and it's not very difficult. Because the route you have to take from clue to clue is so rigidly defined—A leads to B leads to C—all you have to do is find the right item. *Déjà Vu* is thoroughly enjoyable, but RPG veterans will probably find it little more than a snack." —*GamePro* (February 1991)

Insider Insight: *Déjà Vu* plays like a computer game on the NES, precisely because it is a computer game that was ported to the NES. I remember tackling it at around age 12, after enjoying its similarly interfaced point-and-click predecessor, *Shadowgate*. But where *Shadowgate* takes place in a *Lord of the Rings* style fantasy setting, *Déjà Vu* jumps straight to the modern age, or at least to 1930s-era Chicago, where you assume the role of a hardboiled private eye, groggily awakening in a men's room stall with a splitting headache and amnesia, and quickly needing to find out who knocked you out, why, and what criminal operation they happen to be running.

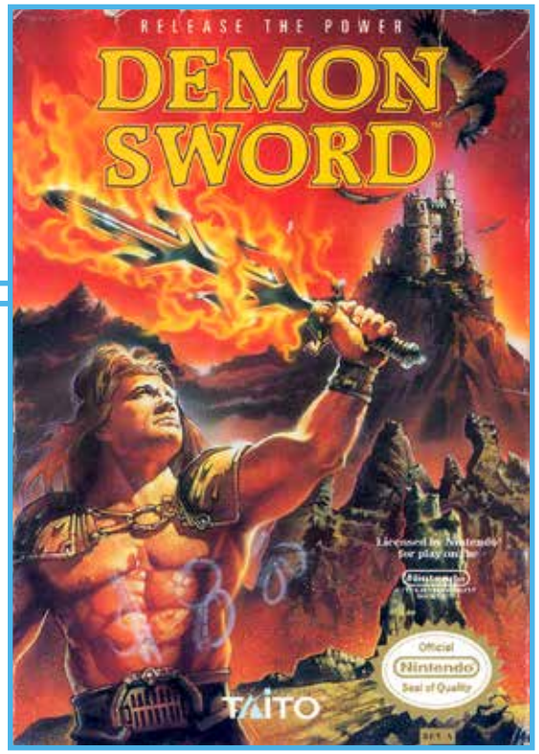
Déjà Vu is certainly an enjoyable game, but many of its puzzles were admittedly just too obtuse for the thinking level of my age at the time. Sure, I made some progress, but often became stuck to the point of going in circles. Thankfully, though, someone at Nintendo must have recognized this possibility because *Nintendo Power* published a huge spread on the game, complete with fold-out map, which effectively revealed all its secrets and directed you specifically on how to win it.

And follow my favorite magazine I did, assembling all the proper clues and items required to save the day. So yeah, I technically did beat the game, and I probably bragged about it to some of my friends. But let's face it: without *Nintendo Power*, I doubt I could have won it even with a Game Genie. It was that tough. But it holds up to this day, and for gamers seeking an intellectual challenge above the NES run-of-the-mill, *Déjà Vu* just might fit the bill. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Demon Sword

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



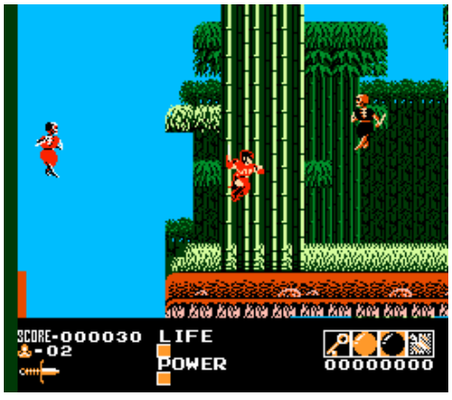
An unofficial sequel to *The Legend of Kage*, *Demon Sword* stars a sword-wielding, star-throwing ninja named Victar who runs and jumps through Bamboo Forest, Cedar Mountain, Temple Graveyard, Fire Mountain, and other areas battling (or avoiding) enemies that approach from all directions. Victar is agile and can jump super high (even to the tops of trees) but landing can be problematic thanks to holes and other traps; blind jumps are one of the leading culprits of cheap deaths. Your sword starts off as little more than a hilt, but is extended with the defeat of each boss. In addition to slinging a sword, players can throw darts and grab such magic items as keys (which open mystic gates), a phoenix (rescues Victar if he falls in a pit), an arrow beam (briefly transforms Victar into three fighters), fire spheres (circle around Victar to protect him), and lightning (destroys all onscreen enemies). The game handles well and has nice, detailed scenery, but the action can get old after a while as repetition sets in. Moving slowly through the game will keep you alive longer, but moving quickly is more fun. The bosses are tough, so you should try to save some of your magic weaponry for the end of each level. If you're looking for a quirky platformer that will provide a couple of hours of fun you could certainly do worse.

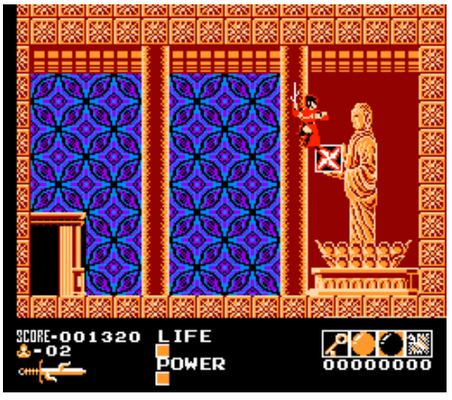
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

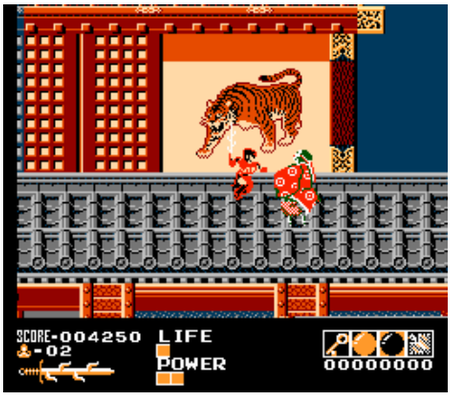
Notable Quotable:
"*Demon Sword* has better looks than *Kage* did, and in many ways it plays much better . . .more power-up items and enhanced graphics . . .however, it controls just like *Kage*, which ruins the effectiveness of many scenes . . . The addition of intermissions is a nice touch . . .the special weapons weren't as overpowering as you would expect . . .the constant jumping becomes repetitive." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Fighting the bosses is pretty easy . . .funny that enemies flip upside down when you smack them. Other than that the rest of this mess looks uninspired and recycled . . .a mess of display glitches and bugs that rival the likes of *Action 52* . . . suspenseful and dramatic anime music . . .controls are easy to master, because as long as you hold Up and Right you can beat the entire level until you get to the boss. When it comes to the actual combat, your character can swing away all he wants and enemies will pass right through your sword. —Twilight Foundry (twilightfoundry.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Although it is easier than its Japanese cousin, *Demon Sword* is still pretty tough. The early stages are rough, as the dagger is near useless and shuriken are weak. You'll take damage at every turn and spend most of your time avoiding combat. It picks up by the midpoint but is still pretty mean. The boss battles are a particular nightmare. It's weird, too, as they don't particularly seem interested in fighting but can inflict massive damage in a single hit. You'll need an extreme amount of patience with this one and I can easily see most bailing." —Classic-Games.Net (www.classic-games.net)

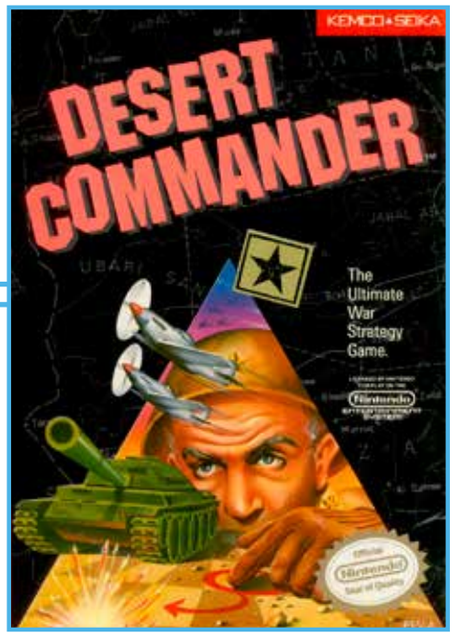






Desert Commander

PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Kemco
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



Despite its generic storyline, *Desert Commander* is essentially a loose, fast-paced reenactment of the North African Campaign (also called the Desert War) fought between Allied and Axis powers (primarily the Brits and the Germans) during World War II. Players take turns issuing commands to their units by moving an onscreen cursor. Once a unit has been selected, a window appears detailing available commands (movement, attack, power, and the like), fuel and ammo supply, and more. Types of units include tank, armored car, transport, supply truck, field cannon, anti-aircraft gun, infantry, fighter, and bomber. Terrain—such as towns, bunkers, airports, and rocks—plays a strategic role, as does the customization of forces (though players can select default mode). The objective is to destroy all the enemy units and capture their headquarters. In the original Japanese version, which translates to *Desert Fox*, gamers choose between the Allied Forces of Generals George S. Patton and Bernard Montgomery and the Axis Powers of General Erwin Rommel.

Notable Quotable:

"A simplified but still challenging recreation of the type of battles fought during WWII between German and British forces in North Africa . . .strikes a nice balance between strategy and action by making turn times relatively quick and the interface easy to use. While it's not detailed enough to satisfy hardcore wargamers, *Desert Commander* is a good choice for board game fans and those who like more thoughtful entertainment." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"If you can live with its irritating little quirks and limitations, it's fun to play . . . During combat the screen divides in half and shows a cartoon-like representation of the battle. Afterward losses are displayed. *Desert Commander* could be significantly improved if these screens contained more realism and movement . . . Friendly units cannot pass through one another, which greatly hampers your maneuverability . . .whomever shoots first has an unreal advantage . . .the importance of supply and the effect of terrain on movement are nicely simulated . . .could be much better, but it's still entertaining." —*Game Players* (November 1989)

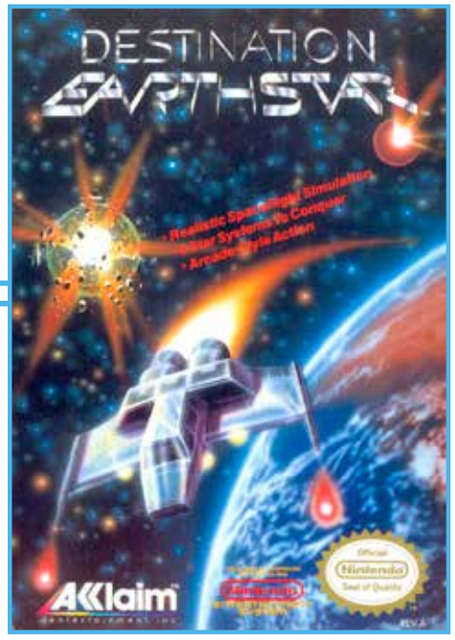
Notable Quotable:

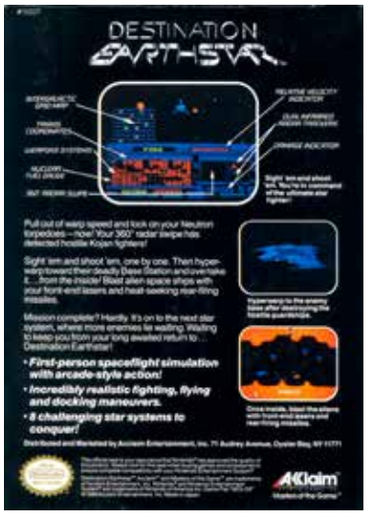
"Smooth difficulty curve . . . Enemy turns are ridiculously slow. You have to wait for their cursor to slowly scroll across the map to each and every unit, and the order the computer chooses units seems awfully inefficient. You also have to sit through each and every combat screen . . . I like the music quite a bit . . . The graphics are well-defined . . . A few of the units look similar enough that it does take some time to distinguish them, but that's a minor issue . . . There aren't too many NES strategy games, but *Desert Commander* is a good example of how to do one on the console. I think that's high praise for a genre I don't care about much." —Take on the NES Library (takeontheneslibrary.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Destination Earthstar

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Space Combat Simulator/Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990




DESTINATION
EARTHSTAR
• First-person spaceflight simulation with arcade-style action!
• Incredibly realistic fighting, flying and docking maneuvers.
• 8 challenging star systems to conquer!
Acclaim

Comprised of eight stages, *Destination Earthstar* has you performing such typical space combat simulator maneuvers as navigating a galactic grid map to locate enemy ships (which typically appear one at a time), engaging said ships in battle, refueling at space stations, replenishing weapons at armories, and repairing ship damage. Unfortunately, it takes seemingly forever to get from one sector of the galaxy to the other (with vast areas of space devoid of anything but distant stars), even when traveling in hyperspace. Also, the graphics are flat and dull. Atari did this type of action better with *Star Raiders* eight years earlier. After you destroy all the enemies in a stage and land on a planet, the action switches to a poorly rendered, though marginally entertaining side-scroller with you shooting front-end lasers and rear-firing missiles at fast and slow alien vessels (destroying faster enemies produces more points). Rockets take off from the planet below, similar to *Scramble*, and you should avoid those. You must dodge the cavern walls as well.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Completely useless torpedoes . . .enemies that resemble Imperial transport ships from *Star Wars* . . .sloppy animation prevents you from ever feeling in control . . . Enemies tend to jump across the screen schizophrenically, forcing you to shoot fast and hope for the best before they zoom off . . . It takes several hits to destroy anything, making the battles feel long and arduous. The screen contains a slew of gauges on the lower half, but as it turns out, it's mostly just for show." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Tries to combine two games into one and fails miserably at both . . .you're aimlessly drifting through space as slowly as possible, listening to the same repetitive song over and over . . . The space exploration part of the game is way too slow and the combat is easy. If you can fight your way through boredom to make it to the enemy base, you'll quickly find that the spaceship shooter sequence is damned near impossible . . .the enemies attack you from all directions . . .seems really intense after you've been floating through the depths of space for the past five or ten minutes . . . I like the idea behind *Destination Earthstar*, but the execution is terrible . . . I love the box art and the instruction manual." —CGR Publishing (YouTube)

Destiny of an Emperor

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Strategy Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Viewed from an overhead, *Dragon Warrior*-like perspective, *Destiny of an Emperor* takes place in ancient, war-torn China, an era popularized by the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Luo Guanzhong, fourteenth century). From a large pool of officers players select a party of seven, five of whom can engage in combat. The other two serve as replacement character and strategist, the latter capable of employing such tactics as fire, water, and healing. Battles, which are turn-based and offer a side-view perspective, are strategic in nature, with players selecting from the following choices: battle, tactic, defend, item, retreat, report, and all-out (a speedy, computer-controlled system where all living characters run to the center of the screen and duke it out). Instead of hit points as in most RPGs, combatants in *Destiny* command a certain number of troops.

Notable Quotable:

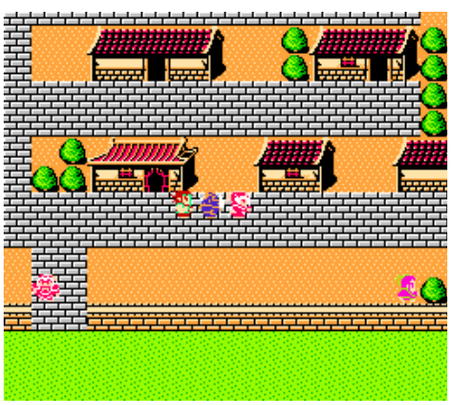
"An excellent choice for those who want more realism in a role-playing game. The *size* of the game will be a real surprise to most players. Several times when I thought I was finished characters popped up with major new tasks to be completed. Expect to take a week or more to finish the game." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Similar to *Final Fantasy* and other JRPGs, where your team is shown walking around a landscape single file and battles are turn based with both armies lining up to do battle. Unlike those games, the characters move quickly around the screen . . . Equipping weapons is tedious . . . The tunes are so great they'll linger in your head long after playing the game . . .underrated . . .forgotten . . .most people's NES RPG memories stop at *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Warrior*. I won't say that this game is better than those games, but I hold it on the same pedestal." —Paul Potvin (www.1morecastle.com)

Notable Quotable:

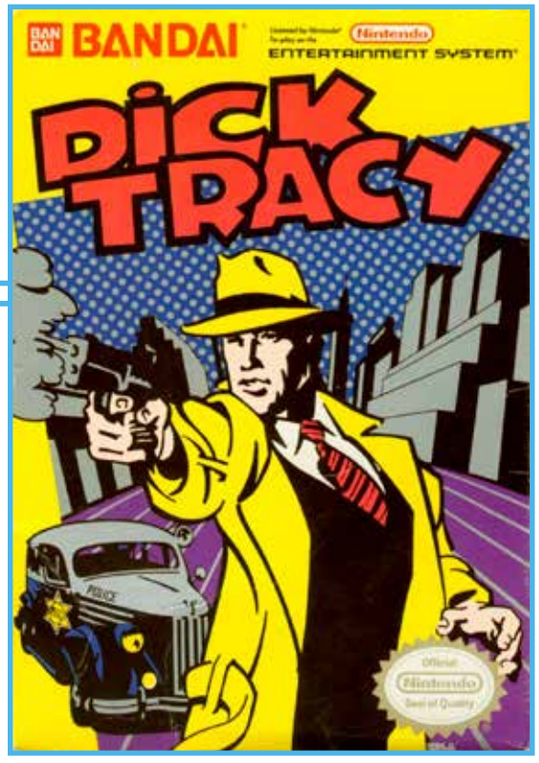
"Better than a lot of NES era RPGs . . . I actually found it a bit educational, as it induced me to do a bit of research about the Three Kingdoms era so I'd have some clue as to who guys like Zhao Yun, Huang Zhong, Sun Quan, and Cao Pi actually were . . . I just found I'd lost interest by the end because the game seemed to get too tedious and repetitive. It seemed the farther I advanced in the game the less freedom I had, as every battle became virtually the same, with me doing my best to negate enemy tactics while S-L-O-W-L-Y whittling down their massive numbers of soldiers." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Dick Tracy

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Based on the 1990 film starring Warren Beatty, Madonna, and Al Pacino, *Dick Tracy* puts you in the title role of Chester Gould's venerable comic strip creation. Mobster Big Boy Caprice is running criminal rackets all over town and it's up to you to take him and his lackeys down. After gathering clues and finding out where you need to go, you hit the streets in your squad car. While you are on the road snipers come at you from all sides. You can try to outrun them, or you can jump out of your car and pick them off one at a time. Cars will also be on your tail. Once you enter a building (other than the police station) the game switches to a side-view platformer where you must punch or shoot a constant onslaught of thugs. Shooting an unarmed thug depletes your health. You'll also jump over obstacles and climb ropes, ladders, and pipes. You're suppled with a notebook for keeping track of clues and a folder containing mug shots of criminals from your rogues' gallery. You've also got your fists, a gun, and a talent for squeezing information out of people through interrogation. You can also find additional weaponry, such as a Tommy gun and some tear gas.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"One of the worst games on the NES . . .atrocious controls, tedious pacing . . .unreasonable difficulty." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

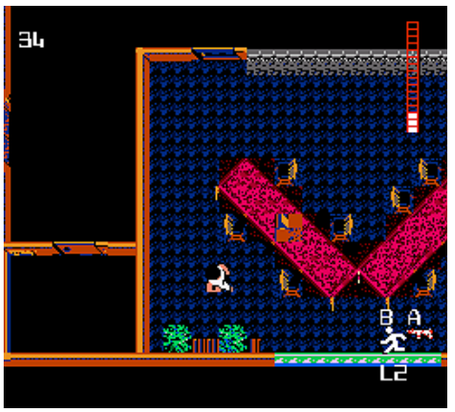
Notable Quotable:

"Shockingly ambitious . . .has some rough edges, but the overall package is fun to play. Gunplay is satisfying and each weapon does feel different . . .bright colors, but limited animation." —Jeremy Peeples (www.hardcoregamer.com)

Insider Insight: *Dick Tracy* was the first original game we designed and produced as Realtime Associates. Because most of my influence at that time was from playing computer games, the whole design was built around looking for clues and solving crimes with a little bit of action. Because that was too vague a concept for the game's audience, players typically entered every building and shot everything until they eventually found the clues we had intended for them to think through. Nintendo had us take away the water barrel corn cob pipe from the Bulldog Café, as it violated their standards of showing anyone smoking. As a slight dig at the company we lowered the dress line on the bust of the close-up of Breathless Mahoney by one pixel, which got by unnoticed. —David Warhol, veteran Intellivision game programmer and the founder of Realtime Associates

Die Hard

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Pack-In-Video
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



A terrorist group led by Hans Gruber has infiltrated the Nakatomi Buildi[illegible] ruining a Christmas party attended by [illegible]cClane and his lovely wife, Holly. John's mission is to stop Hans from blowing up the roof, killing the hostages, and absconding with Holly and a fortune in bonds. As John you run around the labyrinthine building, punching and shooting bad guys while finding and breaking seven different locks. John begins with a pistol, but can obtain a submachine gun, extra ammo, a radio (for listening in on Hans' plans and contacting the police), flash grenades, C4 explosives, an axe, and detonators. The nonlinear action takes you through such areas as heating/air conditioning vents, up and down stairways and elevators, and through finished and unfinished offices. As in the excellent 1988 feature film, which starred Bruce Willis as the hero, John slows down after walking on broken glass, which is a nice touch in an already impressive game.

Notable Quotable:

"Has an open world feel . . .does a fairly good job of incorporating plot events from the movie . . . Moving around is fine, but when trying to shoot your aiming is pretty inaccurate . . .you shoot a bunch of bullets in one direction and hope at least one hits your target, the 'spray and pray' method . . .lasts at most 30 minutes, and the game can be beaten in less time than that if you know what you're doing." —The Gamer's Library (www.thegamerslibrary.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Totally underrated . . . If you just run around shooting bad guys you'll die far too quickly. You must rely on stealth . . . Like *Metal Gear*, you can stay out of an enemy's vision and sneak up from behind . . . Most enemies have automatic weapons that can hit you multiple times in a single burst, taking a bar of life for each hit. You must use cover, accurate shots with your limited ammo, and surprise to have any chance of survival . . . The graphics, sound, and controls are pretty standard NES fare . . .there's a bit too much purple and blue used in place of real shadows . . .an impressive attempt to recreate the tower floors seen in the movie . . .the levels certainly feel like an office building—you can even hide in supply closets and bathrooms." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

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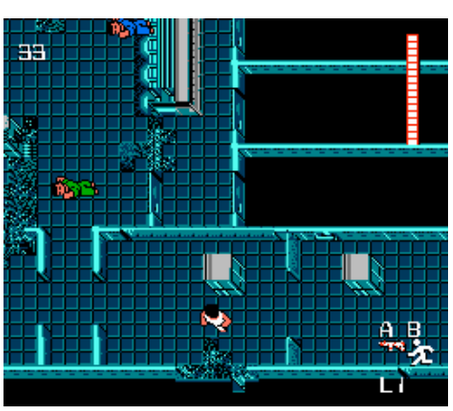
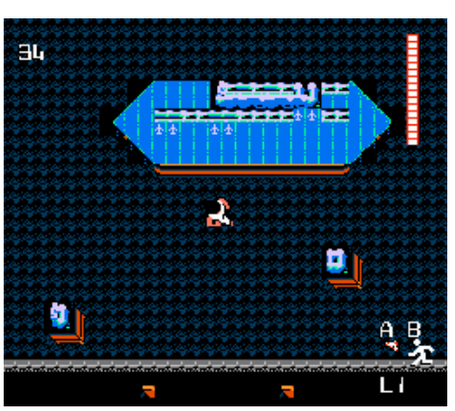
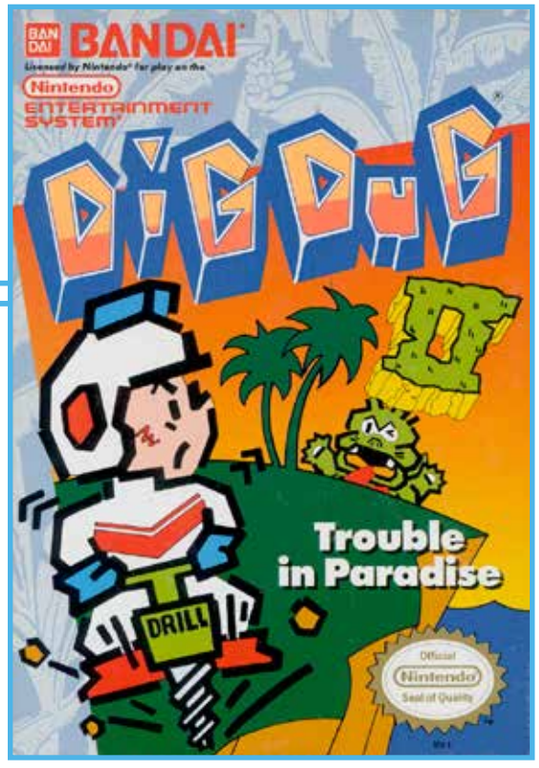




Dig Dug II: Trouble in Paradise

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Namco
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989



An obscure sequel to the popular coin-op classic *Dig Dug* (Namco, 1982), *Dig Dug II: Trouble in Paradise* is a nice port (despite blinking when the screen gets busy) of Namco's 1985 arcade game, which was simply called *Dig Dug II*. Once again, our hero Dig Dug walks around the playfield, using a pump (called an "inflator" here) to blow up and destroy round, shades-wearing Pooka and fire-breathing Fygar. Unlike the original *Dig Dug*, which found the title character digging maze trails, *Dig Dug II* has players drilling on fault lines to sink sections of an island, killing nearby enemies in the process. Drilling three pieces of an island into the ocean makes a bonus vegetable appear, and flying fish can also be caught. There are 72 islands in this fun, addictive, strategy-intensive game. Unfortunately, the original *Dig Dug* never made it to the NES.

Memories: When I first played *Dig Dug II*, I was disappointed it wasn't another tunnel-digging maze title like the original *Dig Dug*, which is one of my favorite games. I didn't care for it much and filed it away on my gaming shelf, only to collect dust. Years later, looking for some old-school action, I tried it again, this time sticking with it long enough to learn to get good at it. Once I did, I grew to thoroughly enjoy it. It's not as intuitive as the original *Dig Dug*, and it's not a bona fide classic like that game, but it is a fun challenge.

Notable Quotable:

"Despite how incredibly popular and highly regarded the first *Dig Dug* was (and still is), this excellent sequel fell through the cracks (literally) of popularity . . .incredibly fun, but it doesn't achieve the same level of simplicity and greatness as its predecessor. The drill needs some practice to get used to, and it will often backfire on inexperienced players. It is definitively not the straightforward gameplay offered by the first game, and this might explain why *Dig Dug II* wasn't as popular as the original." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

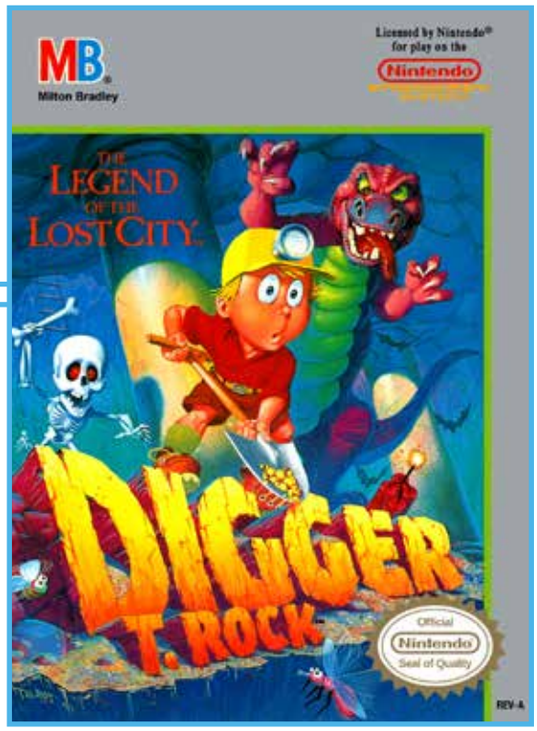
Notable Quotable:

"Controls decently . . .the colors were a tad brighter and less vibrant than in the arcade . . . no shadows in the NES port . . .animations are faithful . . .fun to play every once in a while . . .gameplay is good, the challenge level is solid, and the variety of islands helps it a lot . . . One of the appealing things about the first *Dig Dug* is how addicting it was despite its simple controls. If you're going to deviate from simplicity then you'd better have something that will make it enjoyable and engaging, and *Dig Dug II* sort of succeeds in that regard, even though it can get a little too hard at times." —StarBlog (starboy91.blogspot.com)

OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Digger T. Rock: The Legend of the Lost City

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Published by board game giant Milton Bradley (*Operation*, *Battleship*) and developed by fan favorite Rare (*Donkey Kong Country*), *Digger T. Rock* is an unusual s[illegible]w maze game with platforming elemen[illegible]pite the mainstream, triple-A pedigree, it is an obscure cartridge that is fairly hard to find. Players assume the title role of an explorer who looks like a small child (he favors Calvin of *Calvin and Hobbes*) but wields a mean shovel, which he can use to hit ghosts, skeletons, dinosaurs, and other enemies, many of which re-spawn. More importantly, he can use the shovel to dig pathways through caverns. Digger can also kick enemies, crawl through narrow passageways, jump on ledges, throw rocks at enemies, push pillars, climb ladders (regular ladders and rope ladders you place), ride moving platforms, use dynamite (for breaking walls), and grab diamonds (cash), goblets (points), and mushrooms (invincibility and super strength for kicking columns, boulders, and other obstacles). You earn extra points for using hidden passageways, and there are bonus rooms between caverns where you collect treasure cups while dodging falling boulders. The objective in each level is to find the exit door.

SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Lots of neat ideas, but *Digger T. Rock* is just too frustrating. I didn't really enjoy playing it that much and I don't think you'll be thrilled either." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

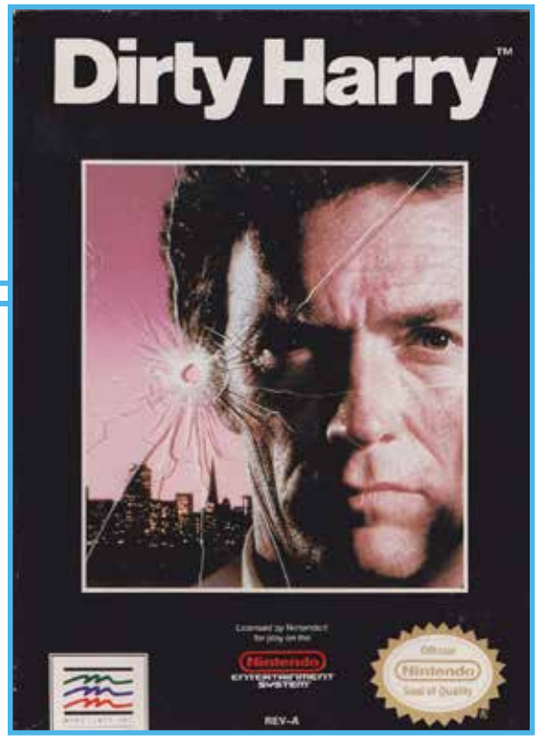
"Colorful characters and a simple story make *Digger T. Rock* a good game for younger players, but the tricky gameplay and complicated mazes will slow down even experienced gamers. Don't be surprised to find yourself frustrated the first few times you play. But if you dig deeper, *Digger T. Rock* is worth the effort." —*Game Players* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Similar in concept to *Boulderdash*, but with much more to it, *Digger T. Rock* is yet another brilliant game from Rare. Oozing quality from the outset, the beautifully drawn cute graphics and catchy music provide instant appeal, and the tricky but highly addictive action keeps you playing. There are plenty of secrets to uncover, including shortcuts around the screen and warps to later levels (so I've been told, but I can't find 'em). If you're a fan of *Boulderdash*, or are just after a game that provides plenty of fun and challenge, check this out—one go and you'll be hooked!" – *Mean Machines* (November 1991)

Dirty Harry

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Gray Matter
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Loosely based on the popular film series that began in 1971 with *Dirty Harry*, this game begins with the famous line coined in *Sudden Impact* (1983), "Go ahead, punk, make my day." You, of course, play the Clint Eastwood role of "Dirty" Harry Callahan, a vigilante cop on the trail of ferocious drug kingpin Anaconda. You'll also face his thugs, including Gruff, the hand grenade-throwing leader of the Hooligans; Striker, the Longcoat leader who packs a Winchester pump; and the sewer-dwelling Toymaker, who commands an arsenal of explosive remote control cars. High voltage wires, snakes, laser security systems, sharpshooters, poison gas, killer cockroaches, acid dripping from ceilings, sparking electrical outlets, and falling rocks will make your job difficult. During your three-level mission, which takes place in The Streets, on The Waterfront, and in and around Alcatraz, you must also climb up buildings and telephone poles, jump across roof tops, climb down in to dark sewers, search guarded rooms for weapons and cash, navigate the rough terrain of Alcatraz island, scale dangerous cliffs, and avoid mines and helicopter fire. Harry can jump much higher and farther in the NES game than he can on the big screen. To aid in your mission, which is super hard, you can pick up such items as plastic explosives, bulletproof vests, gas masks, trash can lids (shields), flashlights, missile launchers, harpoon guns, grappling hooks, and crowbars, which can be used to open locked doors. Your primary methods of attack are hitting, kicking, and shooting with your .44 magnum.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

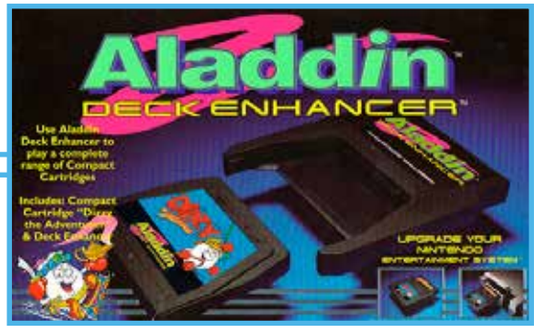
"I guess the developers were big Clint Eastwood fans [given all the in-game references to the actor and his other movies], but a better way to honor him would have been to make a game that doesn't suck." —Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"I'm split on *Dirty Harry* . . .it's one of the most frustratingly difficult games in the NES library . . .there's something I find strangely appealing about getting to play as Clint Eastwood . . . At times the environments and backgrounds sufficiently convey the drab, almost warzone-like appearance of a city under the looming threat of being taken over by an evil criminal empire . . .some of the character models look outright goofy . . . There are so many ways to die so easily it hurts . . .the only way to know your health and how much ammo you have is to hit Start and bring up the in-game menu . . .controls take some time getting used to." —Deviant Art (www.deviantart.com)

Dizzy the Adventurer

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure Puzzle, 1 player
YEAR: 1993


Aladdin
DECK ENHANCER
Use Aladdin Deck Enhancer to play a complete range of Compact Cartridges
Includes Compact Cartridge "Dizzy the Adventurer" & Deck Enhancer
UPGRADE YOUR NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

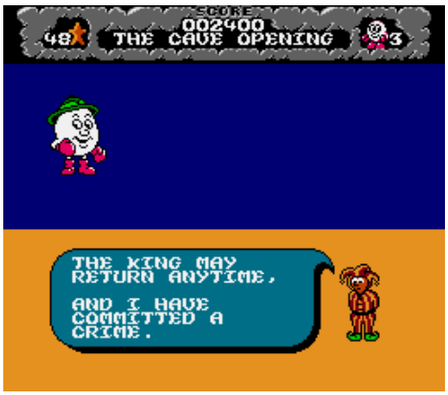
Based on Europe's *Dizzy: Prince of the Yolkfolk*, *Dizzy the Adventurer* was the pack-in game with the Aladdin Deck Enhancer and was the only Aladdin title that was not previously released as a standard NES cartridge. Players guide the egg-shaped hero as he endeavors to save his girlfriend from an evil wizard. Gameplay revolves around platform jumping, collecting 50 stars, and solving puzzles by manipulating objects, such as the first scenario where Dizzy uses a match and straw to burn down a door, then a bucket of water to put out the fire. Dizzy also builds a bridge, gives a harp to St. Peter, uses pliers to pull a thorn out of a lion's paw, and much more. Curiously, falling from high places does not kill Dizzy (falling in this game are lethal), but water does. Unlicensed and rare. See also: *The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy*.

Notable Quotable:

"Dizzy himself looks great and has some cute animations, especially when you fall from a great height . . . The item interface takes some getting used to, but it's not too bad. The real quirk is sometimes when you jump to a higher or lower ledge Dizzy rolls forward, sometimes off a platform into the water, leading to some unfair deaths . . . Combines great graphics and sounds with a lot of personality and charm . . .would have been better if it was a little tougher or even a lot longer . . .still a great cartridge. It may look like a kids' game, but adults will get some enjoyment out of it." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net)

Notable Quotable:

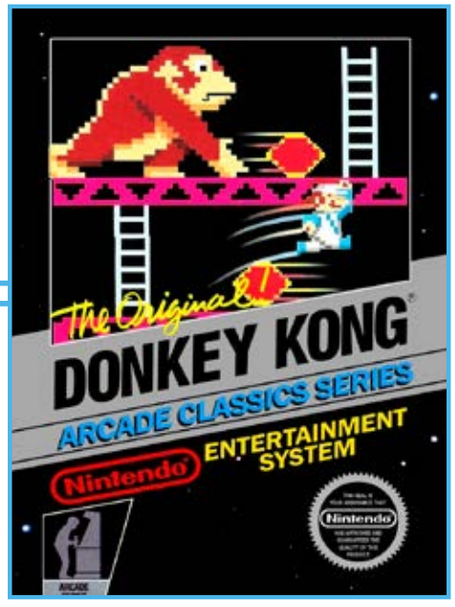
"Ill-advised pack-in title . . .mildly fun . . .platforming action is aggravating . . .some of the castles and caves are pretty neat to explore . . .satisfying when you solve a puzzle and see those flashing point values on the screen . . .the mechanics for using items is a little obtuse . . . The three item restriction is a real drag, forcing you to backtrack to retrieve something you were forced to drop much earlier in the game . . .throughout the entire game you're subjected to high-pitched, whining music that can't be shut off. I like the puzzle element of *Dizzy the Adventurer*, but the game demands a lot of patience." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

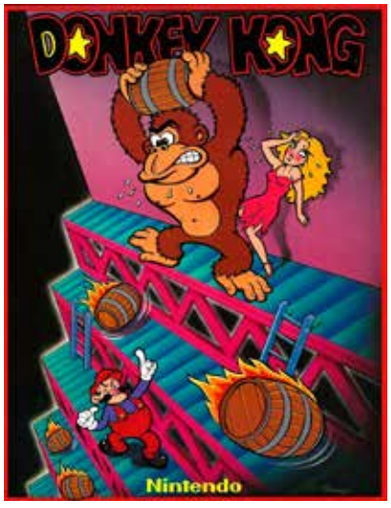


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Donkey Kong

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986





Like the ColecoVision and Atari 7800 versions, *Donkey Kong* for the NES is missing one of the screens found in Nintendo's 1981 coin-op classic (the Conveyor Belt level), as well as the animated intermissions. The remaining three screens are nicely emulated, despite altered placement of certain items, slower elevators, and various other minor issues. In addition, the NES port has much better sound effects (including Mario's squeaky shoes) than the 7800 game. As most retro gamers know, the game has you, as Mario (originally Jumpman), walking along the girders of a building (hence people calling it the Girders stage), climbing the ladders to get to the top of the screen, where Pauline is held captive. Donkey Kong rolls barrels down at you as you walk and climb. To avoid the barrels you can jump over or hit them with one of the two hammers that are within the structure. Then comes the Elevators stage, where you ride elevators as well as climb ladders and walk across girders to reach the top. Watch out for the bouncing I-beams, which are invulnerable. Finally, the Rivets stage is comprised of six horizontal girders that are connected by ladders, but instead of striving to reach the top, you must pluck eight rivets out of the girders. The barrels are absent, but fireballs appear from nowhere; once again there are two hammers you can use to ward off the enemies. At various points in *Donkey Kong* you can pick up Pauline's dropped umbrella, hat, and purse for extra points. Your objective is to rescue Pauline, but in classic arcade style, the levels keep repeating.

Memories: When I got my ColecoVision for Christmas in 1982, I was disappointed that the Conveyor Belt screen in *Donkey Kong* was missing, especially since I rarely reached that level in the arcades. I quickly got over it, as I was amazed how close the game was to the arcade original. By the time the NES came around, and with it being a more powerful system, I was less forgiving regarding the same omission. What did Coleco and Nintendo have against that screen?!

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

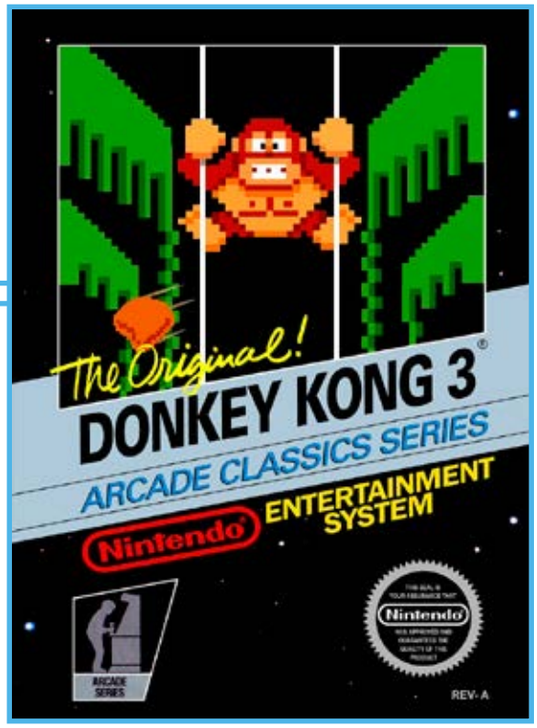
Notable Quotable:
"One of our staff criticized this *Donkey Kong* for not having the captive girlfriend crying 'Help'; a nitpicking complaint . . . Sound in this version is closer to the original than any previous adaptation . . .plays well. Control is smooth, quick, and precise . . .a true video game classic." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1986)

Notable Quotable:
"Each stage is tons of fun, and the varied gameplay stops things getting stale . . . Although you can't adjust in mid-air the controls are responsive, and unlike some other home ports there're no issues with lining yourself up with ladders. The collision detection is spot-on with a perfect difficulty curve. The port from an upright cabinet to a 4:3 display is well done, and the music and sound effects are top-notch . . .a superb port of the arcade classic . . .the sort of game you can play for hours due to the solid core mechanics . . .just tops the excellent port on the Amstrad CPC (1986), which is also missing the Conveyor Belt stage." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"Donkey Kong is a classic among classics, and is definitively the game that put Nintendo on the map in the US and the rest of the world. The game shone with a brilliantly simple gameplay and certainly stood out in the sea of space shooters and maze games that filled the arcades of the early '80s . . . Graphically, the port is excellent and is as close as you can get to the original game (within the obvious hardware limitations of the 8-bit system). Although this version only includes three levels (as opposed to four in the arcade), the game is still as fun as the original, and the controls are responsive and work exactly as they should. However, like many early arcade games, *Donkey Kong* centers primarily on the concept of a high score, and as such some players may find the game too repetitive." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Donkey Kong 3

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986



A stellar port of Nintendo's highly underrated arcade game (1983), *Donkey Kong 3* strays from the climbing/non-scrolling platformer genre popularized by *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Junior*, opting instead for a shooter format somewhat similar to *Gorf*, *Centipede*, and *Galaga*. You control a gardener named Stanley the Bugman—who first appeared in *Greenhouse*, a Nintendo Game & Watch title from 1982—as he works to keep Beespys (smaller bees), Buzzbees (fatter bees), snakes (named Creepy), butterflies, and other pests away from his flowers, which are planted in a row at the bottom of the screen. Armed with a can of insecticide, Stanley must run and jump along some platforms (positioned just above the flowers), spraying away at the swarming, descending creatures. In addition to keeping his flowers safe, Stanley must also worry about Donkey Kong, who climbs down from vines that are suspended from the top of the playfield. Spraying the coconut-throwing ape forces him up the vines. If Stanley lets him reach the bottom of the vines, Donkey Kong jumps down and kills Stanley. If Stanley can manage to exterminate all of the flying pests, or if Donkey Kong is forced all the way to the top, Stanley will move on to the next round. There are three different repeating screens. If Stanley protects all of his flowers he gets bonus points. Fast, fun, and frantic, *DK3* is a bug-shooting blast.

Memories: *Donkey Kong 3* divides people. Many hate it, but I and others I've talked to love it. When the Gaming Historian reviewed it for his YouTube channel, I was glad to see that he gave it high marks. If you forget about the *Donkey Kong* license and just play the game as the hectic and intense shooter that it is, you should enjoy it.

Notable Quotable:
"A delightfully silly game that's especially fun to play because it's not as familiar as the first two games in the series. The play action is simple and straightforward—dodging and shooting—but involving nonetheless. Graphic detail is up to Nintendo's usual high standards, with especially amusing expressions on the beleaguered ape . . .you won't be able to resist the whimsical charms of this one." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1986)

Notable Quotable:
"The game looks great. It has the classic look of the Nintendo characters, lots of colors, and things moving in all directions at all times. There isn't a trace of flicker . . . This is a product of 1986, a time when Nintendo was very much in command of quality. It shows. Unfortunately, the game is about as much fun as being beaten over the head with a sack of onions. The jumping is awkward and the goal sucks. Where's the beautiful girl? Where's the glory? Where the HELL is Mario?" —Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

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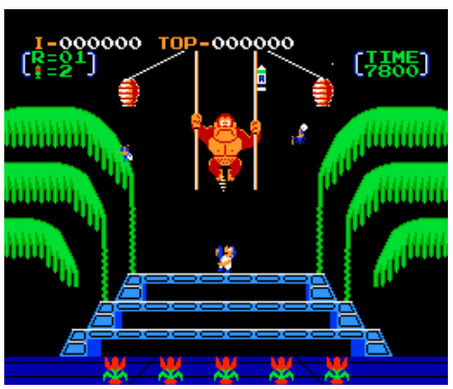
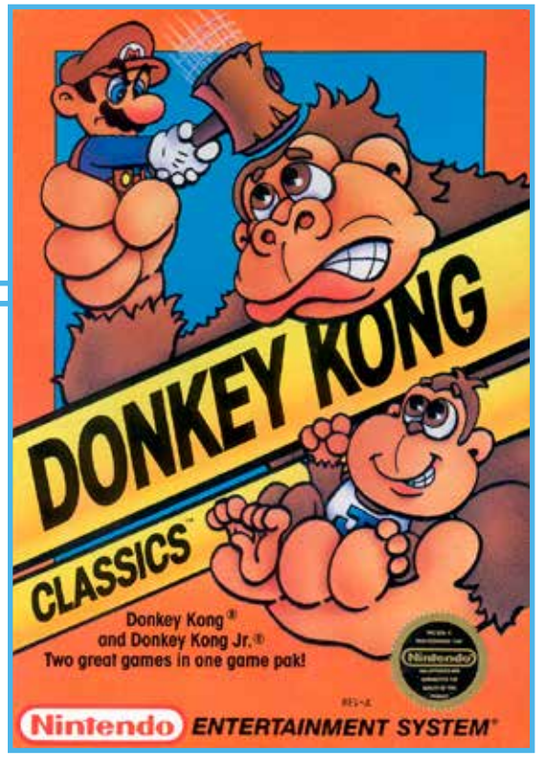


Donkey Kong Classics

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1988



A nice value for your game-buying dollar, *Donkey Kong Classics* contains two previously released, unaltered NES titles in one cartridge: *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr.*, each selectable by a simple menu screen. Oddly enough, it is one of only two authorized cartridges (along with *Anticipation*) that doesn't have the Nintendo Seal of Quality on the label. Also strange is that Nintendo didn't take this release as an opportunity to include the Conveyor Belt level, which is also known as the Pie Factory stage.

Memories: When *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr.* were originally released for the NES as separate cartridges I passed on both, as I was perfectly content playing the ColecoVision versions. When I saw *Donkey Kong Classics* for sale at Funcoland sometime during the early 1990s for a good price, I went ahead and picked it up. I liked the cartoon-like art and orange coloring on the box and label. I was happy with my purchase, as both are nice conversions, despite the missing screen in *Donkey Kong*.

Notable Quotable:
"*Donkey Kong Classics* pulls together two of the greatest games on the NES, and it's an absolute must-own for anyone who loves early arcade titles. Both are addictive and extremely well designed, and the solid gameplay will have you returning time and time again to try and beat your high score." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

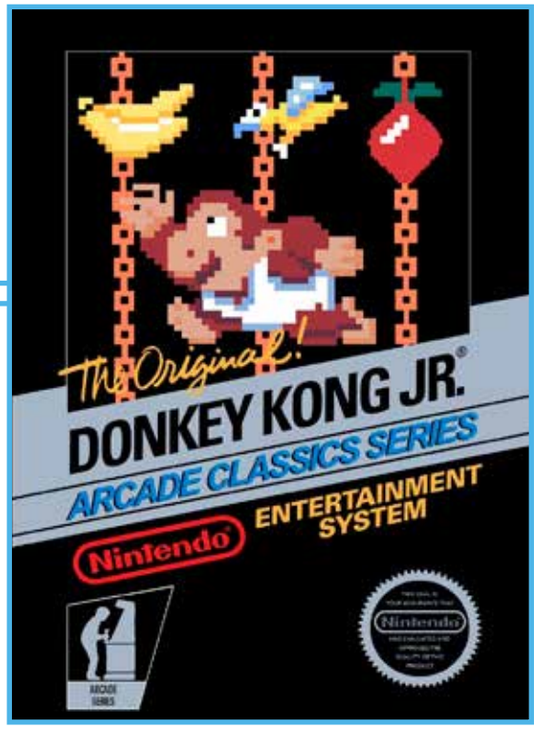
Notable Quotable:
"These games have not held up very well over time; however, they are still fun little diversions. If you are looking to find out more about the history of video games, this is an excellent place to start." —Nintendojo (www.nintendojo.com)

Insider Insight: *Donkey Kong Classics* is a completely unnecessary compilation of two of Nintendo's most famous arcade hits, *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr.* These titles were already a bit long in the tooth when they were originally released on the NES as part of the Arcade Series, so you can imagine how the public felt about them in '88. Indifferent. On top of that, I always wondered why Nintendo only included two games on this collection. Couldn't *Donkey Kong 3* find its way onto the cartridge as well and give fans of the series yet another incentive to purchase? Maybe that was by design, considering how unpopular *Donkey Kong 3* actually was. Nevertheless, I bought *Donkey Kong Classics* for dirt cheap in the late '90s when 8-bit gaming was being heavily looked down upon and games were super cheap. I was happy to have (arguably) the two best home console versions of these iconic games in my collection in one compact cart. If you're not a completionist, this is the NES game to get if you like the home versions of these two titles. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Donkey Kong Jr.

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986



Unlike *Donkey Kong* for the NES, *Donkey Kong Jr.* retains all four looping screens from its respective coin-op classic Nintendo's *Donkey Kong Junior* (1982) in this case. Players guide the titular b as he attempts to rescue his father from Mario's cage at the top of each screen. This requires climbing up and sliding down vines, pushing keys up chains (it's really cool that DKJR climbs faster when grabbing two chains or vines), dropping fruit on (or avoiding altogether) nitpicker birds and snapjaws, and jumping on platforms and over gaps. As with *Donkey Kong*, the animated intermissions found in the coin-op version are absent. The graphics and sounds are exceptionally arcade-like, and the play mechanics, controls, and strategies are so strikingly faithful that only a longtime player would notice the difference.

Notable Quotable:

"Remains our favorite of the ape games because of the variety of its challenging screens . . .takes a fine sense of timing and quick fingers on the controls . . . Nintendo has done a fine job of replicating the look and feel of their lively and amusing coin-op game . . .another classic that belongs in the collection of anyone who enjoys the challenges of climbing-style games." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"*Donkey Kong, Jr.* is an improvement over its father, *Donkey Kong* . . .the gameplay is not as stiff. Since you now control a gorilla that climbs branches the control is faster than before. The only clunky part is when you have to jump off a spring onto a moving platform . . . The graphics are very similar to *Donkey Kong* but a bit crisper . . .improved music, especially the little tune that plays after you beat level one . . .fast paced and very smooth." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Undoubtedly superior to the original *Donkey Kong*, *Donkey Kong Jr.* still carries on some of the arcade awkwardness in the form of its strict, stiff jumping. Most of the game does at least favor the vine climbing mechanic though, meaning that the focus on quick action to avoid enemies and finding your openings for progress allows *Donkey Kong Jr.* to be enjoyable despite the pretty simple overall design. Four stages does mean it's pretty easy to push through the entire game despite its decent difficulty, but small things like planning your approach in stage four and the different speeds of vine climbing mean that even though it's mostly straightforward and a little clunky at times, *Donkey Kong Jr.* can still entertain." —The Gaming Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

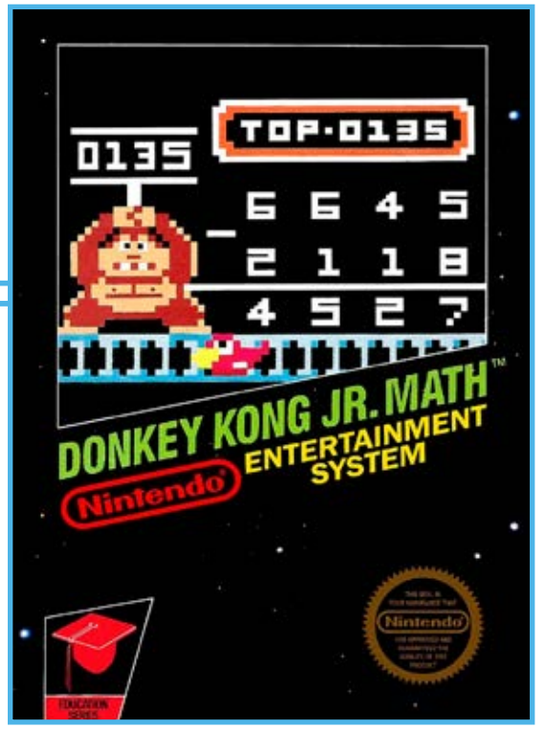
Insider Insight: *Donkey Kong Jr.* is of course the sequel to *Donkey Kong*, and was nearly as popular in the arcades as its predecessor. Or at least that's how I saw it. The *Donkey Kong Jr.* cocktail cabinet was all over my neck of the woods when I was a kid in the '80s. Pizza parlors, sub shops, mini-arcades in the back of gas stations—you name it. *Donkey Kong Jr.* was there as a sit-down machine for me to place my can of pop and my slice of pizza on while I moved Jr. up and down those jungle vines to rescue dear old dad from that mustachioed sadist. I never thought too much about it as a kid, but this game is definitely notable for being one of the rare instances where Mario is seen as a villain.

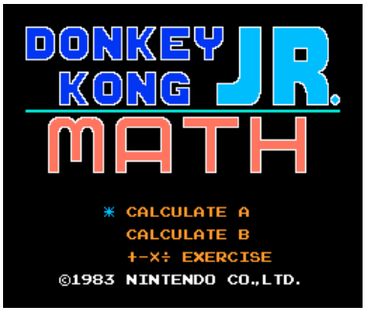
The NES version is pretty darn faithful to the arcade, but by the time I finally picked up a copy for myself I had already owned a version of the game for the ColecoVision that I thought was awfully good as well. I always thought *Donkey Kong Jr.* to be a bit easier than *Donkey Kong* and gravitated toward it as a result. Simple controls and challenging but uncomplicated level designs were the game's strengths. All of this transfers over nicely to the NES. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Donkey Kong Jr. Math

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D2
GAME TYPE: Educational/Math, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1986





An offshoot of *Donkey Kong Junior* (arcade, 1982), *Donkey Kong Jr. Math* uses the basic climbing elements of *DKJ* to drill gamers ages eight and up on addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Calculate A and Calculate B are two-player games, with each contestant guiding a junior Kong (one brown, one pink) up and down vines and on top of small islands to form equations. The objective is to reach the number depicted on a sign that Papa (Donkey Kong) is holding at the top of the screen. Gamers can play solo, but there's no real way to lose unless there's an opponent. A one-player game, +-x÷ Exercise has players climbing up chains to select the correct numbers to solve math problems with a Nitpicker Bird showing the position of the number to be filled. Though good for exercising mental math muscles, this cartridge is light on action, since there are no enemies to avoid.

Notable Quotable:

"Even hardcore mathematicians can't find any value in *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*. It's kind of like a calculator, but with far less functionality; instead of figuring out your own sum Donkey Kong determines the final result, with players forced to use the amazing controls of Donkey Kong Jr.—who is just as graceful as an actual infant—to arrive at this designated number." —Bob Mackey (www.1up.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Donkey Kong Jr. moves so slowly that you try pushing your d-pad down harder in the scant hope he moves quicker, but to no avail. Climbing from vine to vine is tedious . . . Sure, use Donkey Kong as a hook, but if the gameplay was more engaging and better executed then who knows? It could have led to more educational titles on the NES . . .boring gameplay and clunky." —Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"About the only good thing to come from *Donkey Kong Jr. Math* is that it proves game companies tried the 'no, video games can be educational and good, honest' sales tactic even in Japan. Otherwise this is a huge waste—a seemingly half-finished edutainment title created to pad out the Family Computer library in Nintendo's early days as a console maker, built from graphical assets recycled from *Donkey Kong Jr.* Ironically, since no one wanted to own it back in the day, it's become extremely coveted (and expensive) among collectors due to its rarity." —Jeremy Parish (www.polygon.com)

Insider Insight: Video games had been trying to teach me math for years. Be it *Fun with Numbers* and *Math Gran Prix* on my Atari 2600 or various flavors of *Math Blaster* on the computers at school, it seemed that everybody wanted to try and cram education into my video games. When I discovered *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*, I probably played it for all of one minute before shutting it the heck off. Unsurprisingly, it has very little in the way of redeeming qualities. Still, the visuals stuck with me. Many years later *Donkey Kong Country Returns* was released on the Wii, and some early screenshots showed a level with a giant Donkey Kong statue in the background shaped like his NES sprite. Except it wasn't. I immediately noticed that this statue was actually the sprite of Donkey Kong from this ridiculous and boring edutainment game! And that brief moment of discovering this weird little Easter egg was more fun than the entirety of *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

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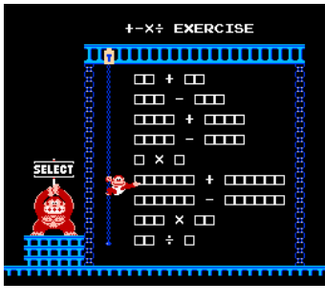
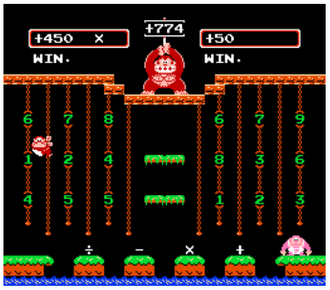
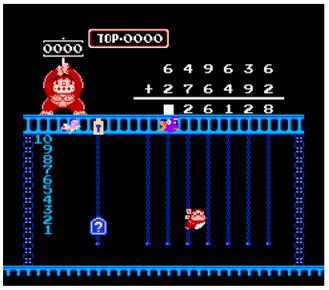
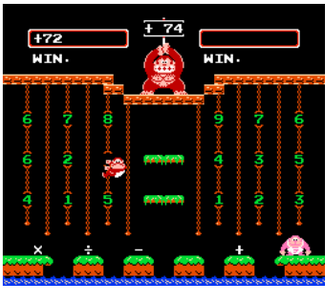


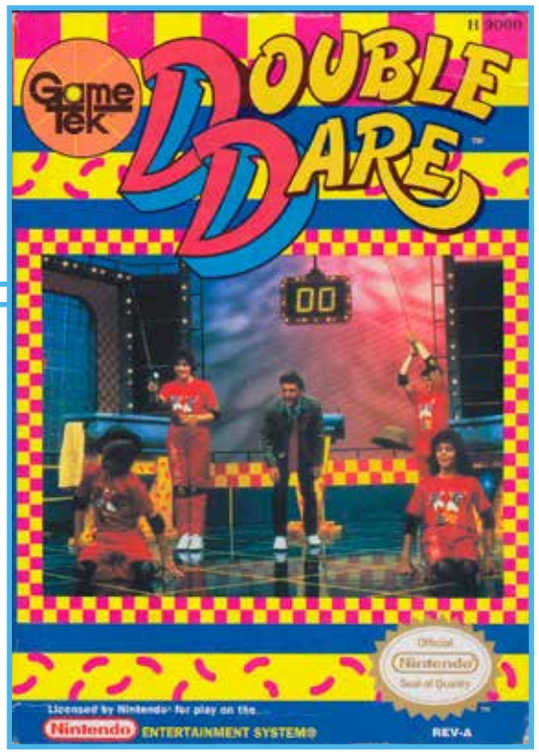


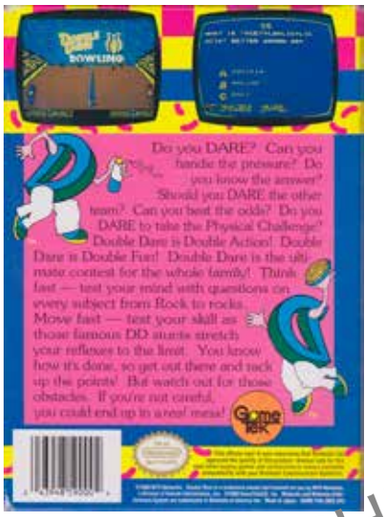




Double Dare

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990




BOWLING
Do you DARE? Can you handle the pressure? Do you know the answer? Should you DARE the other team? Can you beat the odds? Do you DARE to take the Physical Challenge? Double Dare is Double Action! Double Dare is Double Fun! Double Dare is the ultimate contest for the whole family! Think fast — test your mind with questions on every subject from Rock to rocks. Move fast — test your skill as those famous DD stunts stretch your reflexes to the limit. You know how it's done, so get out there and rack up the points! But watch out for those obstacles. If you're not careful, you could end up in a real mess!
Game tek

Double Dare is based on the kids' game show (hosted by Marc Summers) that began airing on Nickelodeon in 1986 and had numerous spin-offs, including *Family Double Dare* and *Double Dare 2000*. The format follows the TV program pretty well, with gamers answering general trivia questions (more than 1,000 in all) and competing in three types of challenges: Toss-up (bowling, golf, hungry clowns, and gorilla), Physical (cake catch, putty golf, ring toss, and the like), and Obstacle Course, which is played by the winner of the most money at the end of round two. Fans of the show will enjoy the game, but the Toss-up challenges can be somewhat frustrating, since each one requires players to set the speed and angle of an item prior to throwing it.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Marc Summers looks like Elvis . . . Also, the set doesn't look right. Sure, it has the iconic checkered look, but everything else is unrecognizable . . .the theme song sounds pretty good . . . The controls are awful . . .you're going to get bored rather quickly answering these questions . . . Stick to watching *Double Dare* on the internet." —Old School Lane (oldschoollane.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The mini games are okay but could use more variety. The question part is pretty poor. While the questions are a decent difficulty for the intended age group, there aren't a lot of them . . . There are some questions that are now false, such as the world's tallest building being in Chicago, but that's pretty amusing . . . The obstacle course is what everyone watched the show for and it's likely to be what everyone plays the game for . . . It takes you a while to figure out how to run (tap left and right alternately), and when you get to the obstacle shown you have to switch to tap left and up alternately." —Video Game Geek (videogamegeek.com)

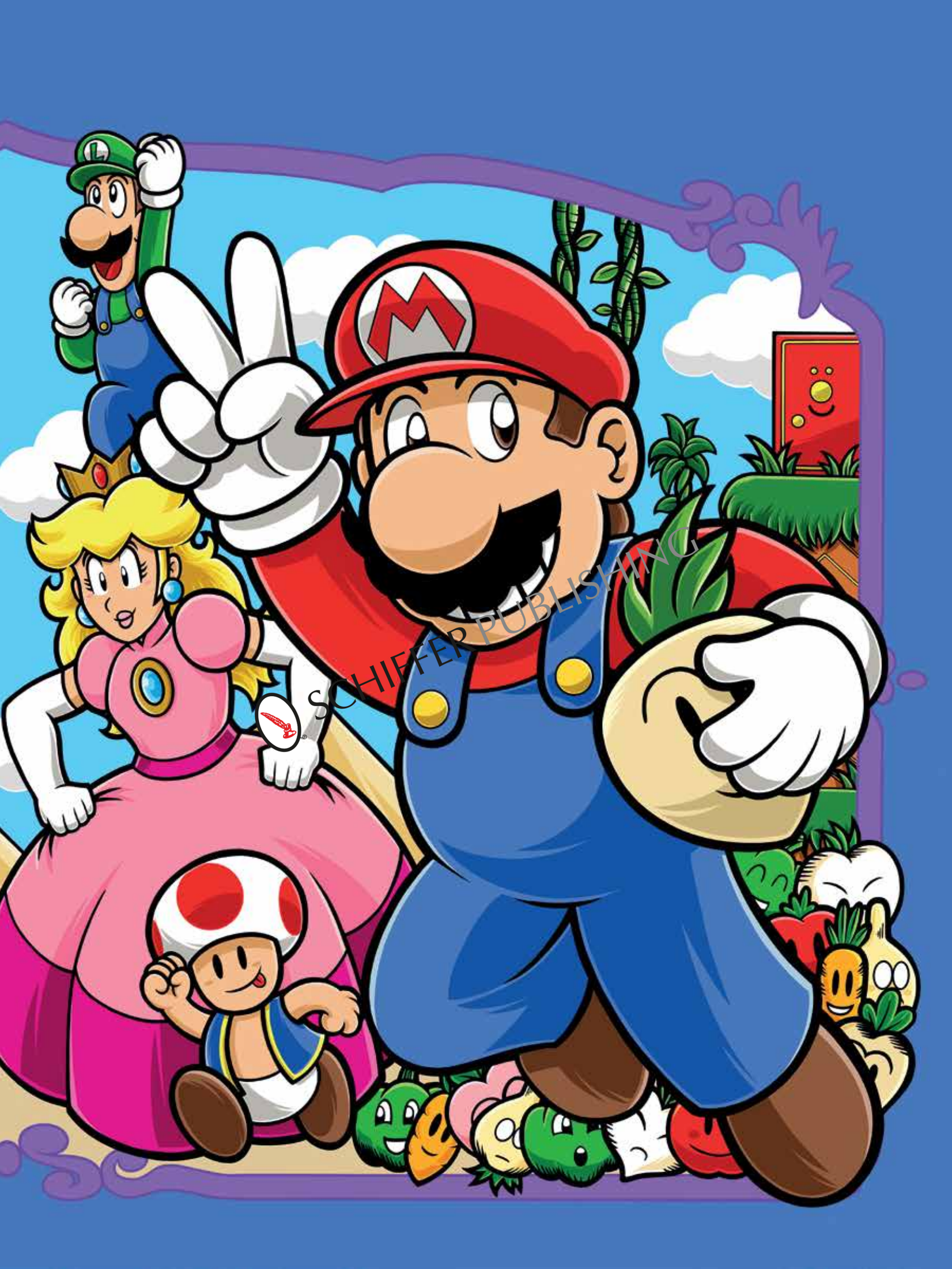
Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are about what you would expect. You can tell what everything is supposed to be and there is a heavy cartoon flair. Characters look pretty decent, and everyone has only three facial expressions (the host has but one) . . . The host non-infringingly resembles Marc Summers, and the colors resemble those used on the set, but the game is more in the spirit of the show instead of a duplication of it . . . The *Double Dare* theme is recreated reasonably well, but the short themes for the physical challenges are mind-numbingly out of place . . . As far as the game goes, it's a fair translation. The mechanics of the game are intact and you get to do basically everything from the show." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

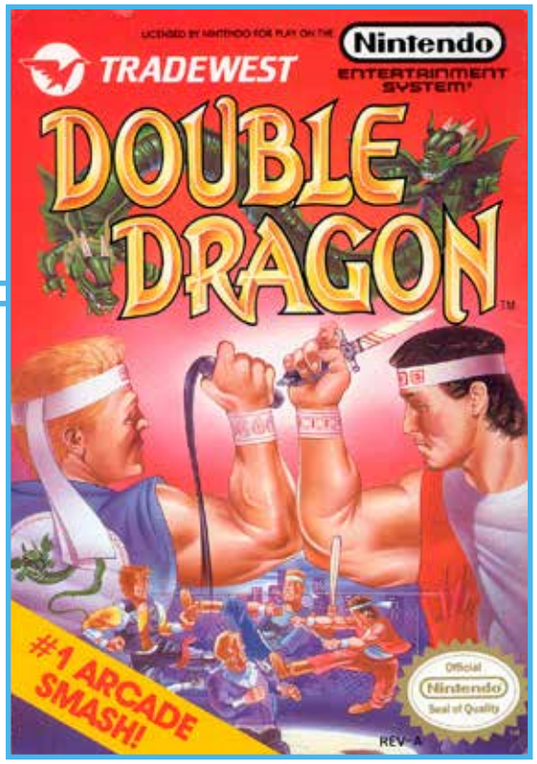
"Despite the control flaws, there is still some fun to be had with this game. Playing with a friend would probably lead to all sorts of hilarity, and even while playing alone it's nice to get the satisfaction of kicking the computer team's ass." —Gamervision (www.gamervision.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING


SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Double Dragon

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Technos Japan
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988

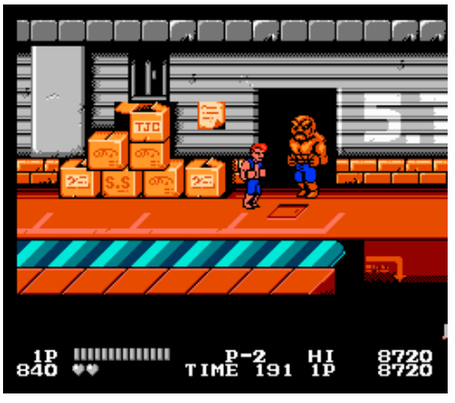


Although it contains just four relatively brief stages—City Slum, Industrial Area, Forest and Hideout of the Boss—*Double Dragon* is a terrific brawler that is fun to play time and again. Gamers guide street tough Billy Lee as he punches and kicks ferocious karate masters, whip-wielding women, oil drum-throwing bad guys, and other enemies. He must also dodge falling stalactites, jump across the occasional gap, and even do a little climbing and platforming. Throughout the game new fighting techniques will be added to Billy's arsenal, including over-shoulder throws, spin kicks, pin attacks, and the ever-popular hair pull kicks. In addition, Billy can pick up such dropped weapons as dynamite, knives, bats, and whips, and he can throw rocks and boxes. The aforementioned RPG-like leveling-up aspect is new to this port, but the game is missing the standard, main game two-player simultaneous mode from Taito's 1987 coin-op classic (something the Master System and Atari 7800 versions retain) and certain levels have been redesigned. As some small consolation, the game adds an option in which players can fight one another as one of six different characters: Billy, Williams, Rowper, Linda, Chintai, or Abobo.

Memories: *Double Dragon* retailed for $50 when it was new in stores. I really wanted the game based on all the buzz, and on the cool box art, but I held off based on the price. Luckily, I was babysitting a couple of kids at the time (very sporadically) and their parents bought me the game as a 'thank you' since I babysat for free (they were good friends of the family and did favors for me as well). Like everyone else, I remember wishing the game had retained the true two-player mode from the arcade, but I was a big solo gamer and played it for many hours, enjoying every moment.

Notable Quotable:
"A very good fighting game with many challenges and enough variety to keep the player interested . . . Its repertoire of 11 separate fighting moves combines the elegance of oriental martial arts with the savvy of street fighting. The graphics are beautifully drawn and very well animated." —*Computer Entertainer* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Some of the best fighting music ever written . . . Sound effects are limited as a tradeoff . . . This is a true classic, arguably even better than the arcade game—if it had a co-op mode, that is." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"On their own merits, both versions are competent. I think that the Sega [Master System] version could have been a little better, as it doesn't play quite well as the Nintendo, but nevertheless, it'll satisfy *Double Dragon* fans. The Nintendo unfortunately lacks the two-player option, but more than makes up for this deficiency with an extra one-on-one *Street Fighter*-style game included on the ROM. As a solo game it's engrossing and fun" —*Computer and Video Games* (December 1988)

Insider Insight: Most every gamer can relate to the friendly playground rivalries of our childhoods with the kids who owned rival systems to your own. There was always the battle of which system was better, which version of a game was the best, and who had the greatest exclusives. This battle very much existed with my neighbor Martin, who owned an NES, while I was an Atari kid. It was the 2600 Jr. I owned and not the far more NES-like 7800, but the battle was still there. I had actually wanted a 7800, but at the time my dad had lost his job and the UK was going through a major recession so money was tight. Even then, the £40 Atari 2600 was a Christmas present shared with my younger brother. But we didn't care about the downgrade too much—we understood why and got more than enough enjoyment from the Jr.

In 1989, something happened for the first time that almost seemed inconceivable; Martin and I bought the same game! We rode the train to our nearest city of St. Albans to purchase a game from one of the many stores there. One of my best friends at school had been there earlier in the week and told me that they had *Double Dragon* for the Atari 2600, and I thought he was joking. It had long been one of my favorite arcade games, and I couldn't believe that a game like that would make it to my beloved system. But we got to Software Plus and there it was, proudly sitting at the top of the Atari 2600 display—*Double Dragon* by Activision and, from the screenshots on the back of the box, it looked pretty good!

I quickly handed over £15 and was excited to get home, but we still had to visit another store because Software Plus didn't sell NES games. So off we went to Boots pharmacy, and it was time for Martin to make his pick. I hoped it would be as quick as mine so we could get home. Thankfully it was, because within moments of browsing the shelves he spotted the NES version of the very same game and got equally excited. His version cost twice the price of mine and didn't have as nice artwork on the box, but it was the same game nonetheless.

After getting back, we split off into our individual houses and agreed to meet up later at the bottom of the garden, where we had a low fence we could jump over, to exchange notes. After a few hours we met up as promised and bragged about the colorful graphics, excellent soundtrack, weapons you could pick up, and range of fighting moves. But then I got to the last point and Martin went quiet as I asked, "Is your version two-player, too?" It turned out that it wasn't! For once I had the bragging rights and the humble 2600 was better than the NES! Once we played both versions more truths became apparent; however, and it was obvious that pretty much anyone would have picked NES *Double Dragon* over the 2600. But I was still happy with my lot. —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

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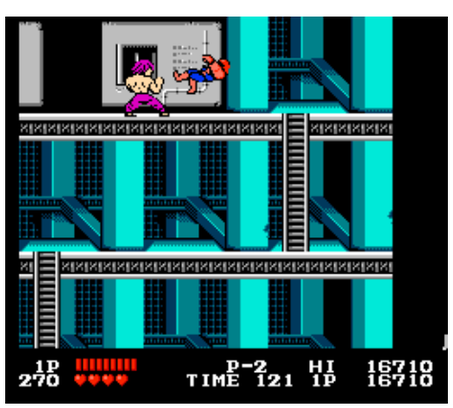
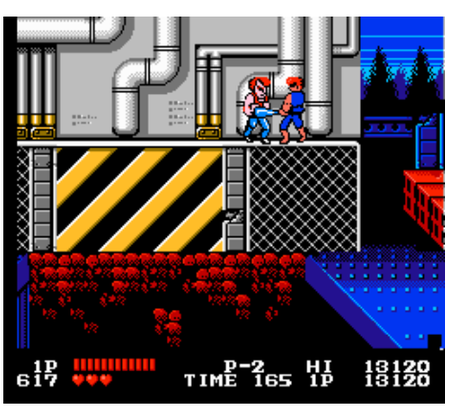
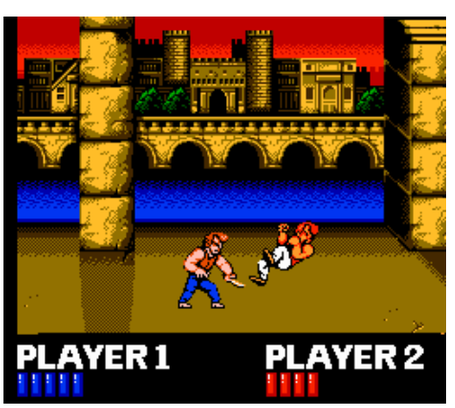
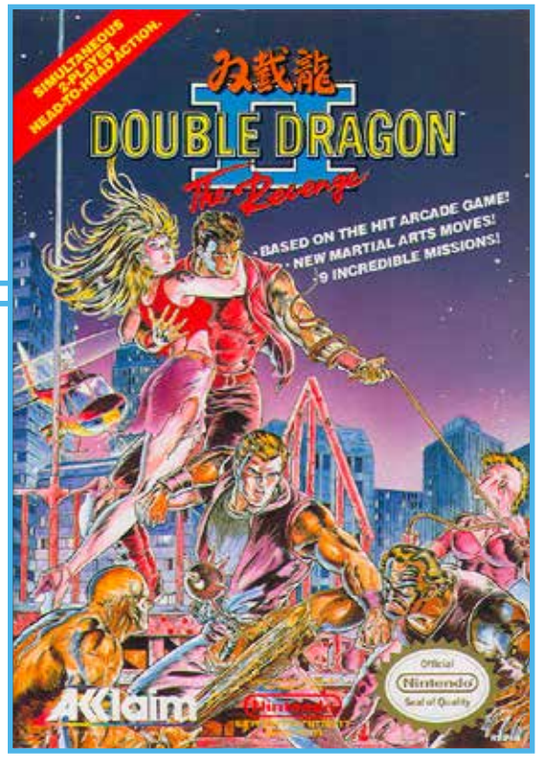






Double Dragon II: The Revenge

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Technos Japan
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



As with *Double Dragon*, *Double Dragon II* for the NES is not a note-for-note port of its respective coin-op counterpart. Technos released *Double Dragon II* to the arcades in 1988). Many of the same elements are present, and the basic action remains intact, but the levels have been redesigned and cutscenes were added. In a quest for vengeance against the Shadow Warriors, Billy and Jimmy Lee must battle street gangs, nunchaku-toting ninjas, giant mutant warriors, and other enemies through nine missions: Into the Turf, At the Heliport, Battle in the Chopper, Undersea Base, Forest of Death, Mansion of Terror, Trap Room, Double Illusion, and Final Confrontation.

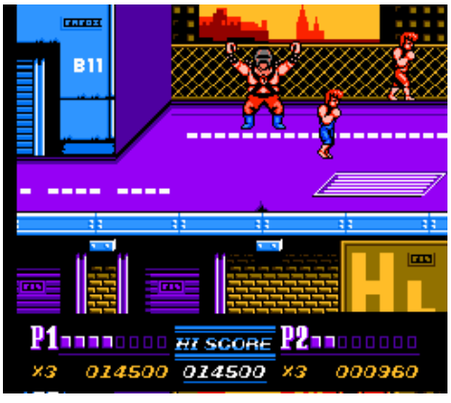
In addition to a variety of punches and kicks (including such new moves as spinning cyclone, hyper uppercut, and high jump kick), Billy and Jimmy can use weapons dropped by enemies. Thankfully, the two-player action remains intact, including a special mode where Billy and Jimmy can hit one another as they progress through the levels.

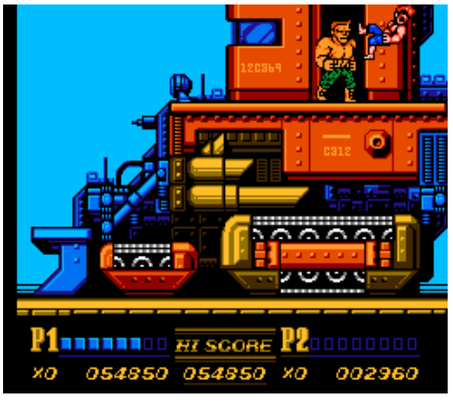
Notable Quotable:

"A phenomenal improvement over the original . . . The graphics, gameplay, and two-player interaction all combine to blow *Double Dragon* out of my NES." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1990)

Insider Insight: The original *Double Dragon* was disappointing. It made significant changes from the arcade version we all knew and loved, including the need to "earn" moves, the addition of strange little mini-stages, and the removal of the two-player option—thus making the actual title of the game meaningless! Then along came this much anticipated sequel which blew the first game away in every conceivable way. Obviously this was a good thing, but it's actually quite strange, given the arcade sequel wasn't as good as the original and the NES version deviated from that even more than the first one did. For those reasons I wasn't expecting much from it.

But then my friend and I saw the review in *Mean Machines* magazine where they pretty much described it as the best NES game ever. We both trusted this magazine a great deal so we decided to ignore our lingering disappointment from the NES original and give it a go. This was one of the few times I was actually as excited to play a new NES game as he was! From the moment he fired it up we were addicted and played the game solidly for weeks. In fact, I wanted to play it so much that I was going to his house at every opportunity, something that greatly annoyed his over-protective mother to the extent that she banned me from coming around for a few days with the excuse that I was stopping him doing his homework! —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

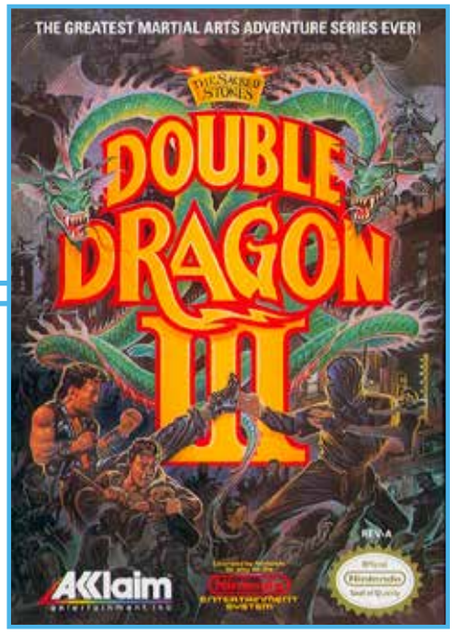




OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Double Dragon III: The Sacred Stones

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Technos Japan
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



In *Double Dragon III* players must retrieve three sacred stones, which are used as ransom to rescue the mysteriously revived Marion, who was thought dead in *Double Dragon II*. Joining Billy and Jimmy Lee (each equipped with nunchaku) as playable characters are Chin Seimei (equipped with an [illegible]aw) and Yogyu Ranzou (equipped with a blade and shurikens), who become selectable after players defeat them in boss-like battles. Weapon pick-ups this time include army knives, broken bottles, and sais, and players can pull off such fighting moves as round house jump kicks, cyclone spin kicks, leaping double-kicks, diving head butts, lunging knee drops, and mid-air somer-assaults. Enemies to fight through the game's five missions—U.S.A., China, Japan, Italy, and Egypt—include street thugs, Ninja warriors, Manchurian barbarians, and other bad guys. Loosely based on the coin-op classic *Double Dragon 3: The Rosetta Stone* (Technos, 1990), which included a three-player mode and shops for purchasing items.

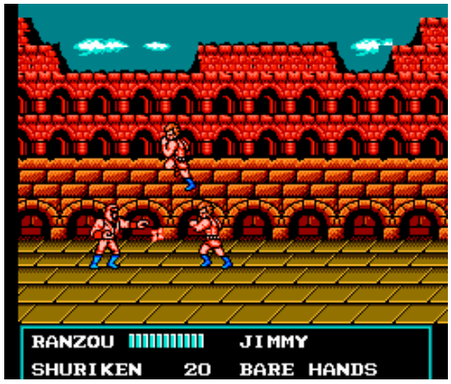
Notable Quotable:

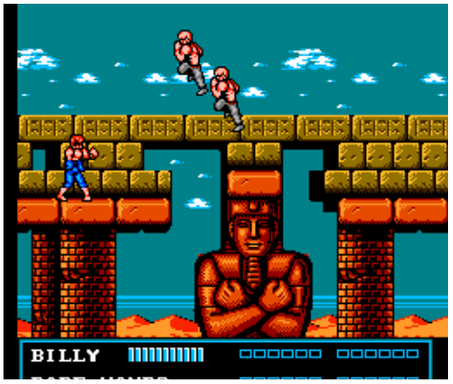
"Ever since *Double Dragon* surfaced in arcades years ago, no fighting game has come close other than the incredible sequels. This sequel is no exception, sporting new radical moves, boggling techniques, powerful bosses, and two-player simultaneous play. A winner!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1991)

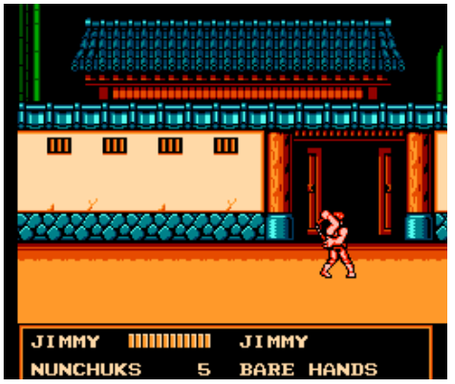
Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay, stage structure, and graphics were completely changed [from the arcade version]. All of this was for the better . . . Certain bosses, when defeated, will join your group, a feature carried over from the arcade. Each of these new additions can radically change the way you play the game and offer up some great play variety, something that is usually lacking in a genre like this . . . This is easily the best-looking game in the series with great-looking sprites, each filled with color. Flicker is apparent, but it never really gets in the way of the action. Things get a little worse during co-op play, but again, never enough to ruin the gameplay. Animation is surprisingly fluid, especially when running. Combos come off smoothly and look painful, just like they should be. Starting off with a stirring rendition of the unforgettable theme this series is known for, the soundtrack continues on an upswing over the rather flat music of the first sequel . . .a great beat-'em-up, probably the best on the system next to Capcom's awesome *Mighty Final Fight*." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight: I liked *Double Dragon III* when I first played it. All I wanted to do initially is the fan favorite Spinning Dragon Kick, but you could now also do this cool move where you did a flip over a bad guy and would grab him by the hair and throw him. I thought that was super cool. And now you could use nunchuks on the boss?! Yeah, I was all in, but the game's flaws became apparent when I died in stage two and couldn't keep going. WHAT!? One life!? That's dumb. Once I kept playing, I realized that you could recruit new characters onto your team and that they essentially became your lives. And I did enjoy how each character had their own strengths and weaknesses. It reminded me of the first NES *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* game, where you could switch to different characters on the fly depending on what the situation called for. It's a hard game to get through but is very satisfying once you finally finish it. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast



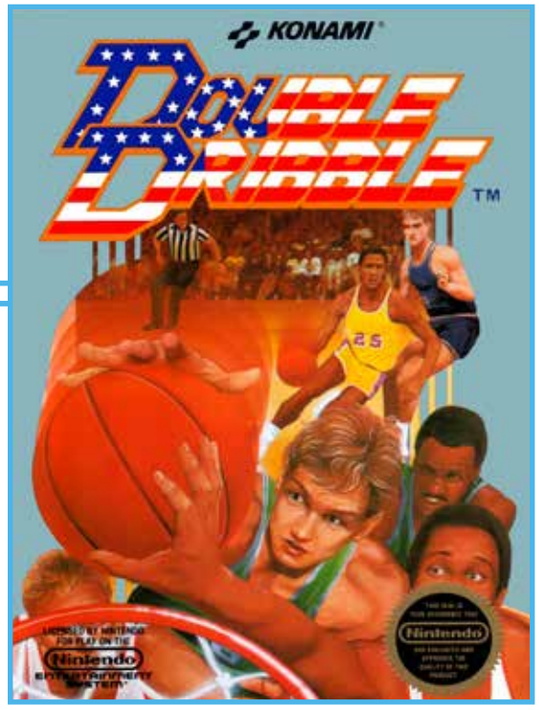




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Double Dribble

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1987



Although the original coin-op version of *Double Dribble* (Konami, 1986)—which ushered in an era of sports games where presentation played a bigger role—has more colorful graphics and a more detailed crowd, *Double Dribble* for the NES is a highly entertaining, hugely influential console classic. The crisp, five-on-five action is memorable for its ease of play, its arcade sensibilities, and its high-flying dunks, which are presented via large animated cutscenes. The game also includes steals, three-pointers, four period lengths (5, 10, 20, or 30 minutes), three difficulty levels, fouls (blocking and pushing), traveling violations, a nicely illustrated halftime show, a 24-second clock, and a solid rendition of the "National Anthem." The elevated view of the action is from the side and the screen scrolls horizontally to show the entire court. There are four teams, each represented by a city name: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York.

Memories: When I was a kid, I idolized my older cousin Ricky for his height, his basketball prowess, and his overall coolness. I thought it was awesome that he could dunk and even asked him to give me a photo of him dunking, which he did. We used to hang out and shoot hoops, and we've remained good friends through the years. One evening in the late 1980s, when I was still living at home with my parents, Ricky came to visit and brought his girlfriend along. After a few minutes of chatting in the living room Ricky followed me to my room in the back of the house to check out *Double Dribble*, which I had just gotten. After well over an hour of furious video hoops action we went back into the living room and Ricky's girlfriend and my mom and dad were sitting in awkward silence, watching television. She looked up from the TV and scowled at us, and probably griped at him later. Oops. Or should that be "hoops?"

Notable Quotable:
"A good way to acquaint yourself with one of America's biggest and best sports. Graphically, the game is a little disappointing; the sprites are colorful, but they lack detail. Though sound is a mixture of jingles and spot effects, they blend together nicely to create the right atmosphere." —*The Games Machine* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Sets new standards for basketball on the Nintendo with some delightful graphical touches and good, solid gameplay . . .has an exciting American 'big league' feel to it . . .has a well-honed system to deliver smoothness of ball control . . .provides lasting entertainment value . . . Both offensive and defensive plays have an authentic feel . . .an exciting end-to-end challenge with lots of baskets. A quality sports simulation." —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Normally we would mark a game down in graphics for blinking players . . .it's perfectly understandable with all the moving objects going on and we found, after playing just a few seconds, the blinking didn't even concern us. From the opening when you see the sports arena in the distance and the crowd races for the arena, to the truly outstanding graphics of the slam dunk screens, the graphics are superb. The court even has the lines of the boards . . .the crisp sound of the ball being dribbled . . . The gameplay . . .is just wonderful and will thrill any basketball fan." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1987)

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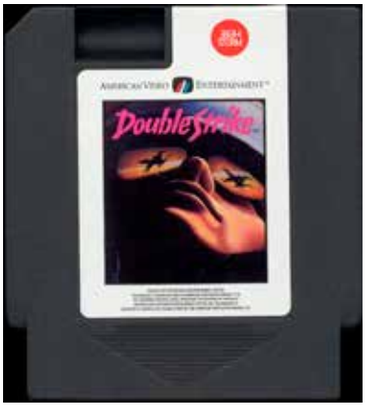
Insider Insight: *Double Dribble* was *the* game as a kid that ended friendships and made one question how important familial relationships really were. Basketball was the big sport for North Dakota high schools, so of course as kids we all wanted to play it. But we also wanted to play video games. Enter *Double Dribble*. At the time we had no idea that it was a port of an arcade game, but looking back it makes sense, considering the fast-paced action and simple, pick-up-and-play controls. Until *NBA Jam* came out several years later this was as close as we ever got to feeling like we were playing an actual NBA basketball game. Even though all of the teams were generic, it had a look and feel unlike anything we had ever played.

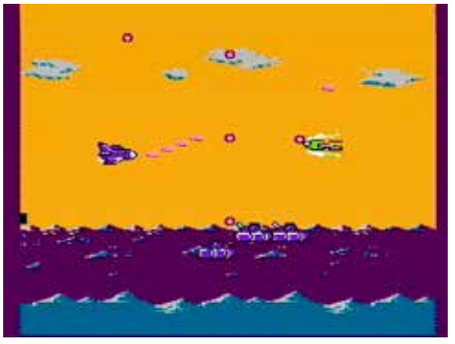
Granted, all we had played previously was *Basketball* on Atari 2600, but *Double Dribble* was still special to us. From the sound of the ball bouncing on the court, to the squeak of the sneakers whenever you changed direction, to the noise the ball made whenever you made a shot, it was all so cool. And the dunks! Seeing our players slamming the ball into the hoop made us feel like we were doing it ourselves. Of course it didn't take us long to figure out the Three Point Shot exploit (taking three-point shots at the top corner of the court and increasing your odds of making a basket), so all of our games turned into contests of who was ultimately the best at making those shots. Even though I didn't get decent at *Double Dribble* until everyone else was pretty much done playing it, I still enjoyed watching my friends and cousins playing the game—and yelling at each other. —John Trenbeath, Co-organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Double Strike

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Sachen
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990.





It's not quite what you'd call a "cut-'em-up" (a term that hadn't been coined [illegible] time of this game's release), but *Double Strike* is a pretty cute (if simplistic) little shooter with pink explosions and perky music. You pilot a small, cartoonish airplane called a Thrasher Hawk-7 through nine pastel colored, smoothly scrolling rounds of sky, jungle, and ocean, shooting bullets at such ordinary enemies as planes, boats, tanks, jeeps, subs, helicopters, and missile launchers. Oddly enough, you also fly past a castle decorated with a backwards swastika. Enemies are basic in appearance and behavior, but there are large bosses to battle as well, such as a battleship, an enemy base, and an airplane. The airborne action moves to the right at a constant pace and the shooting is fairly steady. It includes foreground scrolling, which is unusual for a cheaply produced game. Power-ups to grab include double shot, triple shot, eight shot (spread fire), bombs, invincible, and extra lives. The action can get redundant over time but the game is certainly playable, and it's cool that a second player can join in to help the cause. Unlicensed and hard to find.

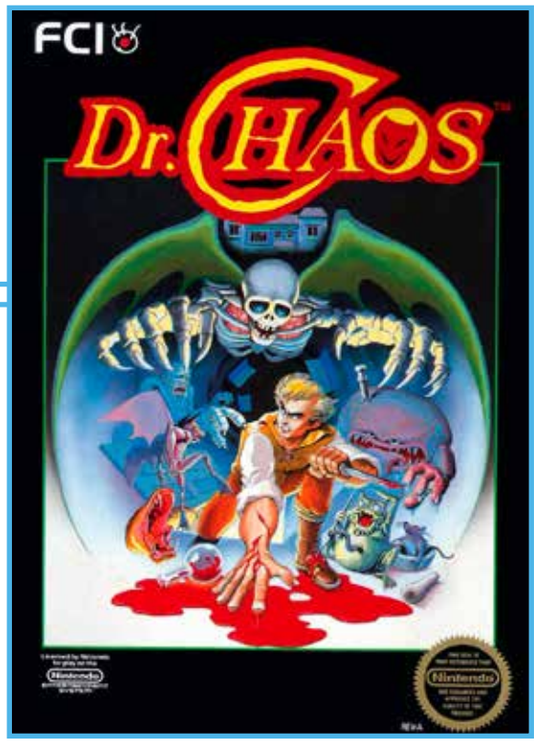
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"A slightly above average, yet incredibly addictive shooter . . .it's as if *1942* became a horizontal shooter . . .the game is fast-paced and tough . . .won't break any originality awards." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:
"American Video will be remembered by most for their passable puzzle games and for their shameless attempts at anything else. *Double Strike* is another one of their shameless efforts. Don't pay any attention to the nice label, as it's the only good part of the game . . .the graphics are just plain ridiculous . . .all bullets look the same . . . Each stage is an endless wave of about the same three or four enemies . . . When you reach a boss the background chops off and it scrolls into a plain blue screen . . . Sound is an abomination . . . Bullets sound like they're from an LCD handheld, and you have to hear them constantly. Music is just as abysmal . . . Gameplay is miserable . . . Most Atari 2600 games are many times more involving than this tripe." —Doug Jackson (www.digitpress.com)

Dr. Chaos

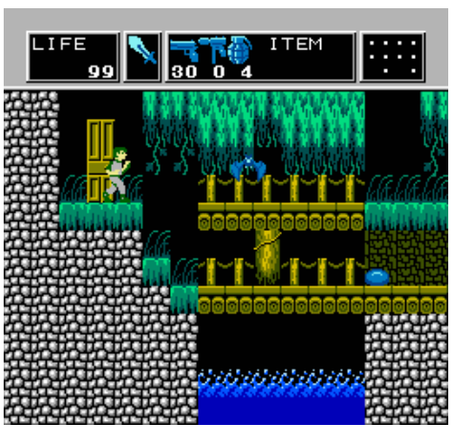
PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Marionette
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



As Michael Chaos, players must search for their scientist brother, Dr. Ch[illegible] who has inadvertently unleashed vamp[illegible], flying skeletons, and other transdimens[illegible]onsters all over his house. Michael begins with a knife, but can collect a pistol, a machine gun, grenades, jump boots, an air helmet, a shield suit, and a laser, the last of which is gained by defeating 10 bosses. Filled with diverse challenges, *Dr. Chaos* alternates between a standard third-person/side-view perspective, with typical jumps and attacks, and a first-person viewpoint, where players guide a hand around a room, opening cabinets and doors and searching for medicines, weapons, and warp zone entrances.

Notable Quotable:
"If you don't mind mapping and you like to solve large, intricate puzzles, you should love *Dr. Chaos*. We found that the only way to explore the mansion (and keep our sanity) was to actually sketch and label each wall and secret passageway of each room. We taped sketches on an office wall in the exact arrangement of the mansion's halls and levels. In all we ended up with 118 sketches, but we had a terrific time . . . a most elaborate and clever game." —*Gamer Players* (October 1989)

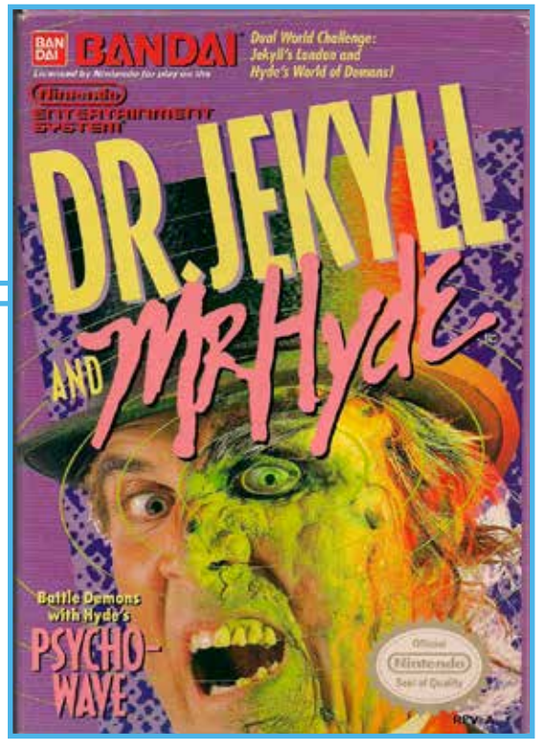
Notable Quotable:
"A truly unique game, but it can be a little disorienting and confusing at first . . .when you start the game you have no idea what you're supposed to be doing. Finding all the warp zones is really tricky, and you have to hit walls in just the right spot to reveal the passageways that lead to them. The game is completely non-linear, and it seems that you can explore the warp zones in any order you want; however, some items are essential and required to access some zones, and figuring out the order in which you should tackle the levels is rather tricky . . . The first-person exploration phases feature cumbersome controls . . . On the bright side, *Dr. Chaos* cleverly combines two genres and some parts can be quite scary—I'm not ashamed to say that I jumped out of my seat the first time I saw that blue yeti monster coming out of a closet." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Advance Communication
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1989


BANDAI
Dual World Challenge: Jekyll's London and Hyde's World of Demons!
DR. JEKYLL AND Mr. Hyde
Battle Demons with Hyde's PSYCHO-WAVE

A butchering of Robert Louis Stevenson's seminal novel about the duality of man, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), this mess of a game finds Jekyll walking through a town, a park, and a cemetery (six levels in all), trying to get to the church to marry Miss Millicent. Jekyll jumps sluggishly and fights enemies—townsfolk, birds, spiders, and the like—by weakly poking a cane at them. He must also dodge bombs put in his way. Should Jekyll's agitation meter get full from taking too much damage he transforms into Mr. Hyde, who battles through forced-scrolling stages, punching and using a psycho-wave (which is certainly cooler than Hyde's cane) to defeat the various hunchbacks, demons, flying skulls, and other creatures he will encounter. Switching back-and-forth between the two characters is a gameplay mechanic with a certain amount of potential, but unfortunately the game is little more than an excuse to use Stevenson's famous creations. The graphics and music are tolerable, but *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is so bad it's scary.

Notable Quotable:
"Flawed on every fundamental level, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is possibly the most unplayable garbage available on the NES." —*Game Informer* (May 2004)

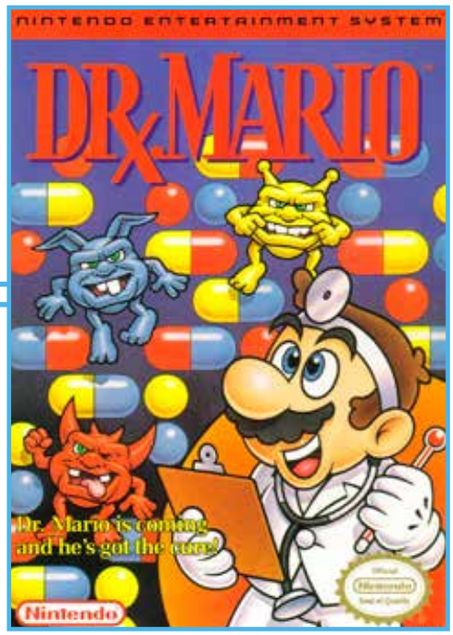
Notable Quotable:
"Of all the unadulterated rubbish that my folks seemingly trash-picked out of the toy stores, the most putrescent had to be *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* . . . It is as dull, repetitive, and bereft of imagination as a month's worth of daytime soaps. What left me most perturbed was that Nintendo had the gall to stamp this game with the Official Nintendo Seal of Quality, a golden icon that up until that point in my life held more meaning for me than the American flag." —Darrell Monti (www.nintendolife.com)

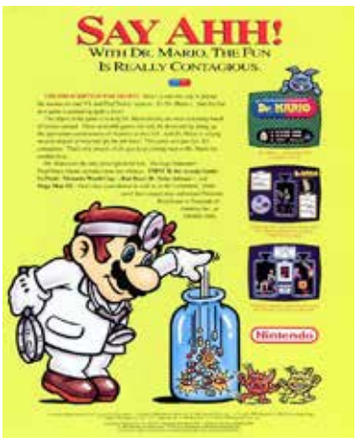
Notable Quotable:
"I actually kinda like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* . . . Sure, it was frustrating at times (almost exclusively during the Jekyll sections), and I spent half my time with it stopping myself from audibly saying 'faster, faster.' That being said, I can't really argue with folks who can't stand the game, writing it off as a complete chore to play . . . I'd seek out the Japanese version above the international one, since the two extra levels and inclusion of Mrs. Rachel give it an extra bit of variety." —Bad Game Hall of Fame (www.badgame-halloffame.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Dr. Mario

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990





One of many *Tetris*-inspired puzzlers that flooded the market during the early '90s, this game features Mario, positioned near the top of the screen, dropping vitamin capsules into a bottle-shaped playfield filled with viruses, and the player must rotate the capsules and position them in such a way as to remove the viruses from the screen. The capsules, which are divided into color-coded halves, come in red, yellow, and blue, as do the viruses. When four or more capsule halves and/or viruses of the same color are lined up in a row by the player they disappear. *Dr. Mario* is one of the better, more enjoyable puzzle games for any system thanks to crisp visuals, pleasant audio (the music is especially chipper), strategic gameplay, and smooth difficulty progression. Nintendo really knows how to produce highly polished games that everyone can enjoy.

Notable Quotable:

"Color-matching puzzle games are timeless, and *Dr. Mario* remains one of the most celebrated of the genre. While it may not be as deep as some of its counterparts, it has more than enough charm to be considered a classic . . . The vibrant visuals, habit-forming gameplay, and infectious music make it a must-own title that's been remade many times, but the core gameplay of the original remains intact no matter the console." —Games Radar (www.gamesradar.com)

Notable Quotable:

"At first sight this appears to be yet another *Tetris* clone. Investigation reveals that the gameplay is considerably different: destroying the viruses is a tricky procedure that requires a strategy that's close to—but not the same as—*Columns*. As with all puzzle games, *Dr. Mario* has a problem with its long term playability; it's great fun for a while, but you'll be bored with it soon. However, it's definitely one to be dug out of the cupboard on regular occasions, in the same way as *Tetris* and *Columns*." —*Mean Machines* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The strength of the core design and a nice multiplayer supplement make the original *Dr. Mario* excellent, even though it will be outdone by its sequels on other systems just by way of them having more content. The original NES title's limited design is what kept it from completely succeeding, with its final levels coming too soon and not having the most exciting designs since they're essentially just nearly full bottles. Introducing new colors, bigger playfields, or just some other way to engage the pill and virus formula could have kept it going longer without getting stale, but the game as it exists provides a safe breaking off point with its final 'true' level that doesn't ask the player for an overly long engagement that could wear down the formula's effectiveness." —The Gaming Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Insider Insight: I am completely and utterly addicted to the new *Dr. Mario* for mobile phones. I guess that shows you just how much this classic game has endured—it's every bit as addictive and enjoyable as it ever was, with very few changes made to the core gameplay. Before I had it on my phone, it was one of my go-to titles on my 3DS. When I fire up my original Game Boy or NES, one of the first games I play is—you guessed it—*Dr. Mario*!

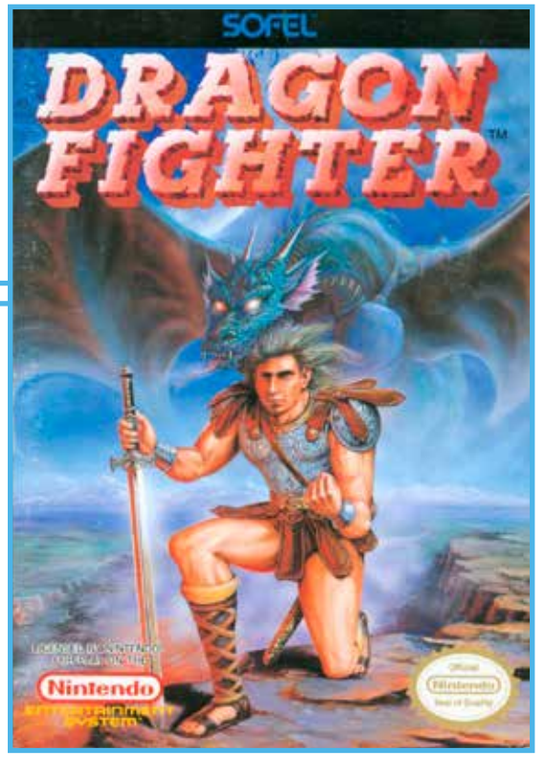
While growing up I was that guy who hated Mario and all his games, but that changed one day when I went into my local Dixons (a now long defunct UK electronics retailer) and played *Dr. Mario* on the demo unit at the back of the store. After quickly becoming addicted to the game I begged my next door neighbor to buy it for his NES, but he wasn't into puzzle games, so no luck there. Then, when my younger brother got a Game Boy for Christmas, I once again started up the *Dr. Mario* campaign, but he was more than happy with *Tetris*. Finally, I managed to persuade one of my friends to lend me the Game Boy version—the only problem was that I had to give it back!

Many years went by before I truly got to satisfy my craving for *Dr. Mario*. My then-girlfriend told me she had an old Game Boy under her bed somewhere and was pretty sure that was one of the games! Lo and behold it was, and she let me keep the Game Boy, too. It might sound crazy to some, but *Dr. Mario* is undoubtedly my favorite Nintendo game ever, and after all those years of missing out, it's now a game I'd never be without. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Dragon Fighter

PUBLISHER: Sofel
DEVELOPER: Natsume
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



A fun, nice-looking hack-and-slash action title, *Dragon Fighter* puts you in the role of a running, jumping, crouching hero who looks like Robin Hood and uses a sword to lop off ogres, snowballs, maggots, flies, spiders, mechanical beasts, fish, mermen, flying skulls, and other enemies and obstacles. Destroying baddies charges up a meter, allowing you to morph into a dragon, which basically (and briefly) turns the game into a side-scrolling shooter. Grabbing color-coded orbs offers such power-ups as replenished health, the ability to fire projectiles, napalm, spread shots, or heat seekers. While you're a dragon the meter slowly drains, and once it is empty you automatically return to human form. *Dragon Fighter* has six levels, including a living cave, an icy field, a water palace, a factory, a castle of the undead, and a tainted sky, the last of which is all dragon all the time. A buried treasure in the NES library, *Dragon Fighter* is a very hard game to find.

Notable Quotable:
"Despite some limits in character maneuverability, *Dragon Fighter* is a good-looking game that packs plenty of fun and a tough challenge." —*GamePro* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"I know the term is overblown to NES fans, but *Dragon Fighter* is indeed a hidden gem . . . The graphics are well done, the music is good, the gameplay is solid, the bosses are fun to fight, the challenge is appropriate, and the optional hard mode is well thought out . . .one of the most expensive NES games. The price is obviously a major barrier if you want the authentic experience, but if you have a Powerpak or play on an emulator *Dragon Fighter* is a game that is worth checking out." —Take on the NES Library (takeontheneslibrary.com)

Notable Quotable:
"I never saw it on store shelves, for rent, or even a print review . . .a pretty good action game along the lines of *Shadow of the Ninja* . . . The game does a good job pacing itself in terms of content with a new set of enemies introduced in every level . . . Enemy attacks are near relentless in a way that is off-putting. Little restraint is shown as they spawn from all corners of the screen and almost never stop . . . Despite the pace being faster than *Castlevania*, you have to play *Dragon Fighter* in a similar fashion, always taking measured steps and considering when to attack . . .the production values are amazing." —Classic-Games.net (www.classic-games.net)

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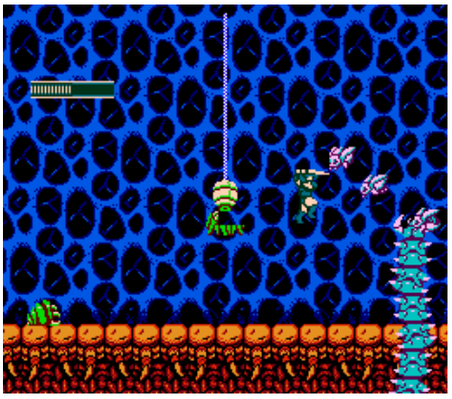
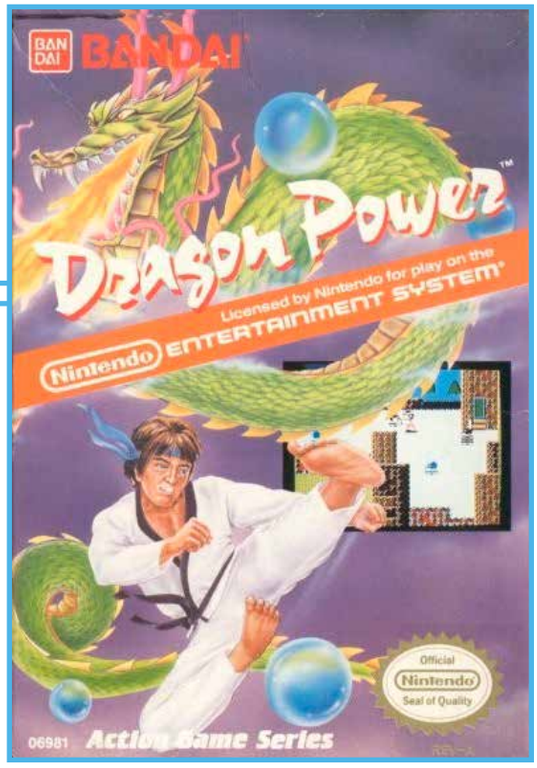


Dragon Power

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



Dragon Power puts you on a quest to find seven crystal balls. You'll guide character named Goku around caves, grassy plains, mountains (flat though they are), and other areas, punching bad guys or jumping to attack them. For battling baddies Goku can acquire wind waves and a magic pole, the latter of which has twice the power and a longer range than punches. Goku can also eat sandwiches to run faster and ride on swift clouds to fly to the end of scenes. Boss battles offer a side-view perspective, and numerous cutscenes find Goku conversing with pals. Unfortunately, bland graphics, tepid fighting, and unconvincing character movement—Goku appears to be sort of sliding along instead of walking—ruin the experience. An Americanized take on *Dragon Ball*, the popular Japanese anime/manga property, *Dragon Power* was altered for US release, most notably removing references to the franchise and changing Goku in appearance to resemble a monkey.

Notable Quotable:

"*Dragon Power* could have been a perfectly good action/adventure game if it wasn't marred by infuriating difficulty. Still, fans of *Dragon Ball* will get a kick out of reliving some of the earliest chapters in the series. The simple visuals and repetitive audio don't help either, especially when coupled with shallow gameplay. There's fun to be had here, but know what you're getting yourself into before buying." —Defunct Games (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Dragon Power* makes absolutely no sense . . . At least had it been a *Dragon Ball* game it would have had a chance of a story . . . As it is, the dialogue, locations, objectives, and even items . . .are totally inscrutable most of the time. The gameplay doesn't stand up in either version . . .a lot of nonsensical secret passages—from the *Deadly Towers* school of 'how the hell did I end up here' design. It also shares with that game the 'moving up means both moving north AND rising vertically' thing that makes jumping enemies basically impossible to avoid . . . Boss fights become battles of attrition with no room for skill . . . I admit a certain fondness for *Dragon Power*. I don't think it's nostalgia, but rather appreciation of the pure randomness of it. Something so haphazardly translated would never make it out the door these days. Trying to construct some kind of storyline out of the half-melons, legless pigmen, and sandwiches here is a lot more entertaining than just a *Dragon Ball* game." —Engadget (www.engadget.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: Like many American kids my age, I learned about *Dragon Ball* through the early, hilariously translated cartoon that ran on Sunday mornings. Afterward, my friends and I would travel to Philly or Atlantic City and hit up import shops for bootleg VHS tapes, wall scrolls, and basically anything *Dragon Ball* we could get our hands on. What we didn't realize was that there was an actual *Dragon Ball* video game in our homes this whole time. A friend of mine had a copy of *Dragon Power*, but he had only played it once or twice when he first got it because he said it was stupid. Mind you, this was well before we had discovered *Dragon Ball Z*. Out of curiosity I asked him if I could borrow *Dragon Power*, and he said I could just have it. Within moments of playing it my jaw hit the floor. That's Goku . . .with a haircut. The crystal balls are Dragon Balls. That's Master Roshi, Bulma, and more! They were weird-looking, but they were undeniably them. That night, I told my friend *Dragon Power* was actually a *Dragon Ball* game and he immediately wanted it back. I still have it. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

Dragon Spirit: The New Legend

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Now Production
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

A fun and challenging shooter with an unusual "ship" to control, *Dragon Spirit: The New Legend* captures the spirit of Nam[illegible]987 arcade game (which was simply cal[illegible]*gon Spirit*), but it does feature some differences. In both games players fly a dragon over volcanoes, jungles, glaciers, and other areas, shooting airborne enemies and bombing ground targets (à la *Xevious*). Shooting certain enemies and bombing eggs releases items to power-up the dragon with multiple heads, wider dragon fire shots, power wings (for invincibility), and earthquakes (which destroy all ground-based enemies). The NES version adds dual dragons—one small dragon on either side of the main dragon. The NES game also includes a short introductory level (culminating in a battle against the demon Zawel) that determines the game mode: Blue Dragon or Gold Dragon, the latter of which is easier, but only lets gamers play five of the game's nine levels.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

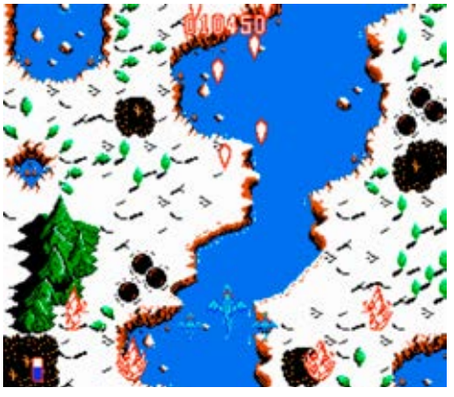
"While many will argue that the graphics in this version aren't as good as the others, the real joy of *Dragon Spirit* is the solid shooting action and the new enhancements to uncover in the NES copy. Better than the arcade in many play moves!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

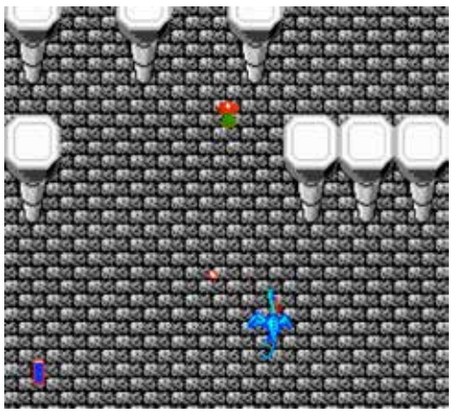
Notable Quotable:

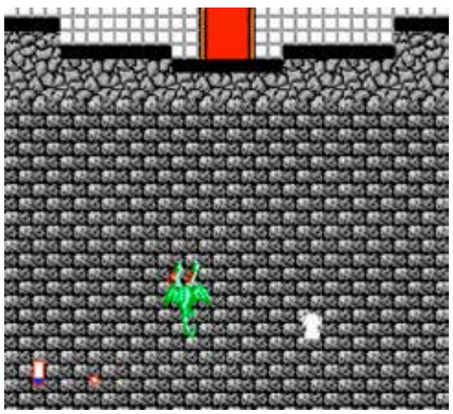
"I've always liked *Dragon Spirit* more than most shooters. It was one of the few arcade games I ever came close to finishing before the inevitable home port, which probably fuels my love of the game as well. Around the time of its release, the majority of shooters were still a lone ship against an alien armada. So seeing one with a fantasy setting was incredibly cool . . . Regardless of what you go in expecting, *Dragon Spirit: The New Legend* is a great game. Those that want a faithful port are better served with the TurboGrafx version. If you don't mind a loose port with a lot of new content, this is the game for you. Namco succeeded in capturing the same look and feel of the arcade game, producing one of the system's better shooters." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Most of the levels are based off the arcade game's stages, but the layouts and enemy patterns have changed. Some have additional obstacles—for instance the third stage, the jungle, has thickets you need to shoot through. In the sixth stage of the arcade game you need to shoot through glaciers. In the NES version, the game speeds up and you need to weave between thin corridors while shooting out the ice . . . In the eighth stage of the arcade game, the Dark Zone, your dragon has a small headlight (??) that lets you see enemies directly in front of you. In the NES version the lights simply flicker on and off. There are also a few completely new areas and final bosses . . . The NES version just feels different, as it runs at a slightly faster speed. There are less enemies and your dragon is much smaller, even when powered up. And the hit box is smaller still, so bullets can graze your wings without killing you. Power-ups are also much more common . . .a much friendlier, much more playable game." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)







Insider Insight: When my younger brother and I received our Nintendo Entertainment System for Christmas in 1989, we were taken to Toys 'R Us to pick out one game each. I chose *Ironsword: Wizards & Warriors II*, and my brother picked *Dragon Spirit*. We raced back to my grandmother's house to play them, and my brother won the rock/paper/scissors match in the car to decide who got to try theirs first.

So I sat there, watching my brother play this vertically scrolling shooter, a genre I was not fond of at the time. The game had all the makings of an exciting shmup, but as it droned on and on I became exceedingly bored. My brother seemed to feel that way too and began to whine about picking a bad game and wanting to go back to the store to get another one. He didn't understand the whole "once you open it it's un-returnable" thing, so he had a meltdown and cried for the rest of the afternoon.

I found the situation funny. It was only a game, after all. Why get so worked up? So I tried the game myself. Almost immediately I understood why he was having a temper tantrum in his bedroom upstairs—I couldn't stand the game either.

Dragon Spirit was hard, at least for someone who had just received an NES. The icons you pick up were too small to make out, so once you reach a supremely overpowered state you could accidentally downgrade yourself by touching the wrong power-up. The gameplay confused me with the two different attack methods. I couldn't keep up with what I was looking at, so figuring out what was bombable and what was in the air to shoot was taxing on my patience. I also found the graphics ugly and the music annoying.

I put the controller down and walked away from the television. My mother asked me if I liked the game I chose and my response was, "I haven't played it yet, but I can see why Danny is mad at his." And that was it. We never played *Dragon Spirit* again.

Flash forward to 2014. I had recently gotten back into video game collecting and stumbled upon a cheap, but complete copy of *Dragon Spirit* on eBay. I sat there staring at it for what felt like an eternity. I kept saying to myself "Do I?" and "Don't I?" over and over again. My tastes in video games had shifted radically at this point in time, and I now loved shooters, but the memory of my brother's meltdown kept me from clicking that "Buy It Now" button. In the end I took a chance and purchased it. "Maybe I'll like it now" I said to myself, and if I didn't, I'd just flip it for another game.

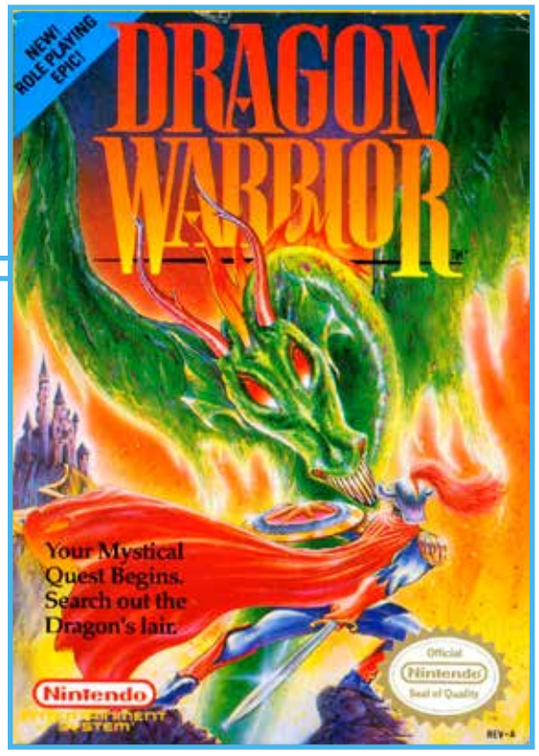
When *Dragon Spirit* arrived, I popped it into my NES and played it for two hours straight and completed it on my third attempt. Now a much better player, I found the game extremely fun and clever, if a little easy once you get the hang of it.

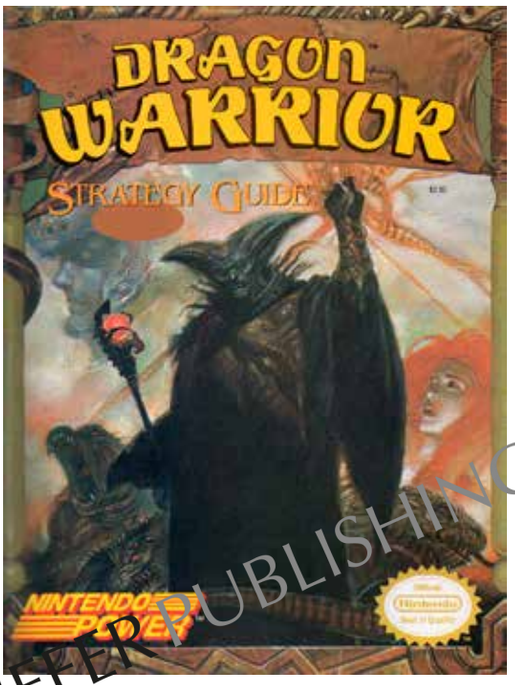
I felt so energized by this 180° attitude toward the game that I felt compelled to review it for my YouTube channel. In fact, it was my first video game review—I felt that strongly about it. Afterward, I searched for and found the TurboGrafx-16 version, which is fantastic, but nothing compared to the memory of how the NES version went from being a game I avoided playing for decades to becoming one of my favorites on the console. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker, and Gamer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Dragon Warrior

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Chunsoft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1989





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Released the year after *Phantasy Star* (Master System) and the year before *Final Fantasy* (NES), *Dragon Warrior* seems old now, but with its top-down perspective, Japanese heritage, and mainstream acceptance (free cartridges were available by subscribing to *Nintendo Power*), the game was a huge influence on subsequent console RPGs. Cast in the role of a descendant of a hero named Erdrick, players must rescue a princess and recover balls of light stolen by the evil Dragonlord. This involves performing magic spells, exploring maze-like towns (accessed via a world map) and dungeons, speaking with non-playable characters, battling monsters via turn-based battles, leveling up your character, acquiring gold for purchasing such items as swords and armor, and much more. To initiate an action players must access a menu and select from such commands as fight, run, talk, stairs, door, search, and take.

Notable Quotable:

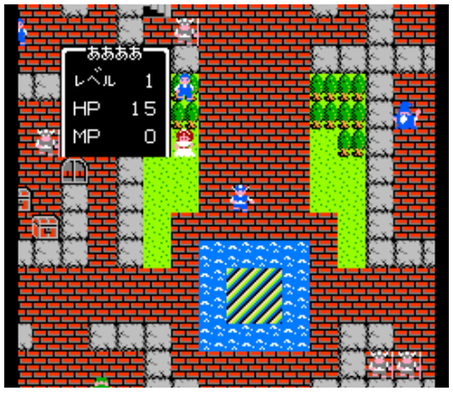
"Typifies the new breed of sophisticated Nintendo games . . .demands almost no dexterity at all . . .requires patience and strategic thinking . . . *Dragon Warrior* is patterned after the role-playing games that have been available on personal computers for years. Although it lacks certain details—you can't design your own character and only one person can play at a time—it's an excellent rendition of a popular theme." —*Game Players* (December 1989)

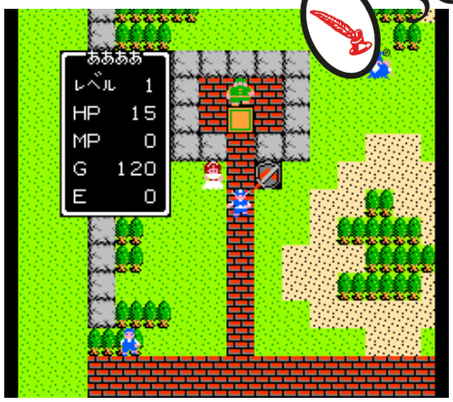
Notable Quotable:

"A large part of *Dragon Warrior*'s low replay appeal lies in its high difficulty . . . Virtually every new challenge the player undertakes in *Dragon Warrior* requires a session of dedicated level building before any reasonable chance of success can be had. Players who don't mind long interludes of monster hunting may not mind, but the sluggish game tempo will definitely turn some RPG'ers away . . .the absence of any party system leaves little margin for error in battles . . . The colorful, attractively designed foes help enhance the battle mode, but the remainder of the game's graphics leave much to be desired. The overworld map consists of but a handful of terrain tiles, and the unvarying appearance of such a visible aspect quickly becomes highly tiresome. *Dragon Warrior* can be expected to consume 20–30 hours of an individual's life . . . Everything from its extremely 8-bit graphics to its dialogue style proudly proclaims its vintage, and after grinding through the ascendant to all of today's RPGs, you may find yourself with a new appreciation of modern fare." —Bill Johnson (rpgamer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"An okay game that has not aged very well, but is still very much playable for die-hard JRPG fans who want to know where it all started . . .helped lay the foundation for future RPGs." —RetroGame Man (retrogameman.com)





Insider Insight: Back in 1990, my friend where I lived in Cincinnati had a basement with all sorts of games, a pool table, and assorted electronics. One day when I went over he was playing *Dragon Warrior*. I was captivated by the music and the size of the world. The opening fanfare prepped you for the epic adventure that was to come. I hadn't seen anything even remotely close to that before. Later that year my parents bought me an NES for my birthday. I immediately started begging for them to get me *Dragon Warrior* and they delivered. I've spent countless hours in Alefgard since then. Tantagel Castle was my first real experience in a high fantasy world like that, and it's a world I've gone back to many times. It was my introduction to RPGs and the stories you could create in those types of worlds. *Dragon Quest*, as it has since come to be known by its proper title, is and will always be my favorite RPG series. It's stuck to its roots over the years and that's one of the reasons I love the series so much.—Tony Miller, writer for Nintendo Okie, host of the Procedurally Generated Show

Insider Insight: I don't remember the year when *Nintendo Power* offered a free copy of *Dragon Warrior* to new subscribers, but it seemed too good to be true. After a solid week of pestering my mother she agreed to buy a subscription; clearly I had convinced her of the overwhelming financial benefits of this offer. Ordering anything through the mail as a kid in the '80s required infinite patience. Long before Amazon Prime, and at a time when CODs were still accepted, 6–8 weeks of "processing time" was pretty standard. In fact, it took so long I had actually forgotten about it when I received the package.

I tore into the padded envelope and was surprised that not only had *Nintendo Power* sent the game, but also a miniature *Explorer's Handbook*, a laminated Adventure Guide card, and a fold-out map and bestiary. As luck would have it I was grounded from playing Nintendo at the time, so I was only allowed to read the *Handbook*. I must have read through it dozens of times, even taking it to school. All of the armor, weapons, shields, and items were illustrated and explained. The guide included maps of towns and dungeons, combat tips, partial walkthroughs—it was the best thing a kid could have asked for when not allowed to play the game. By the time I was actually allowed to play *Dragon Warrior* I felt like a seasoned player. Had I played the game the day I received it, I don't think I would have enjoyed it half as much as I did after so much anticipation and preparation. Now the franchise (with 10 direct sequels and countless spin-offs) remains one of my favorites.—Andy Slaven, author of the *Video Game Bible* (2002)

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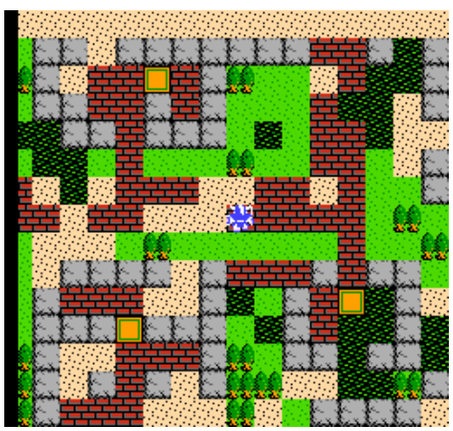
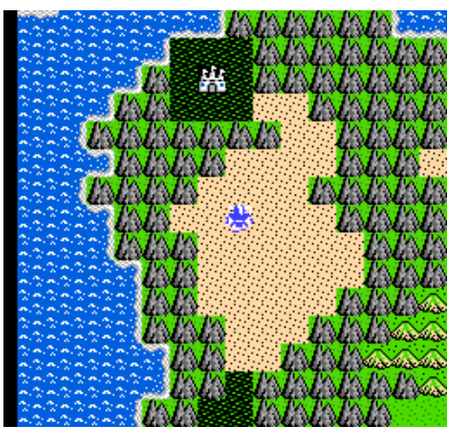




Dragon Warrior II

PUBLISHER: Enix
DEVELOPER: Chunsoft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Set 100 years after the first game in the series, *Dragon Warrior II* finds Moonbrooke Castle under attack by the evil Sorcerer, who aims to rule the world by calling on the "ill-omened gods from the dark." To save the day, players must journey through a world (towns, castles, plains, deserts, mountains, swamps, caves, seas, and forests) four times as large as that found in the original *Dragon Warrior*. Gameplay is similar to *Dragon Warrior*, but with several new features, including more spells and items, sailboat navigation, battles against groups of monsters (as opposed to nothing but one-on-one fights), and three playable characters: the Prince of Midenhall (uses weapons and wears armor, but cannot do magic); the Princess of Moonbroke (uses magic, but not armor or weapons); and the Prince of Cannock (an amalgamation of Midenhall and Moonbroke).

Notable Quotable:

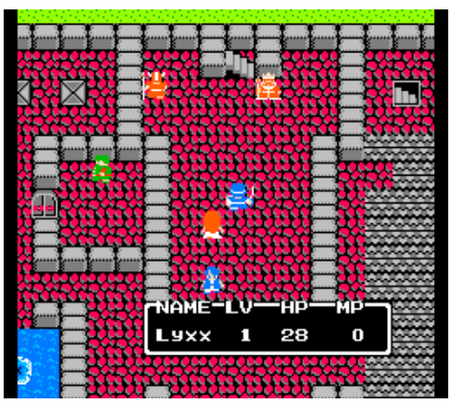
"Taking off where its predecessor ended, *Dragon Warrior II* further journeys into a land that, while totally original, plays out in a fashion that is similar to *Ultima*. The game just doesn't retain the same enthusiasm, and while it may be a huge hit in Japan, it misses the mark." — *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

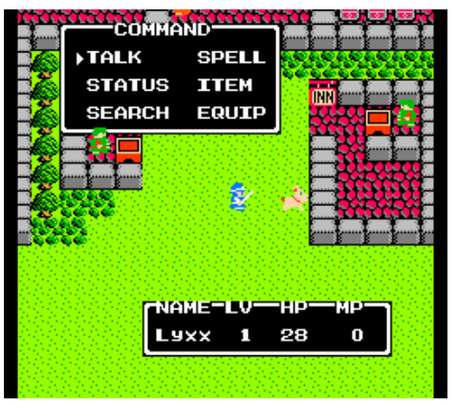
Notable Quotable:

"There are a wider variety of characters and monsters, but they're still not animated very well, and they're still very generic and simplistic . . .a wider variety of environments to explore . . . The new weapons and spells are interesting and provide a breath of fresh air . . . Average compositions and poor sound quality abound . . . It's got neat new ideas and a much better story than its predecessor, but unfortunately the gameplay leaves much to be desired. People don't mind leveling-up a little bit, but *Dragon Warrior II* requires a ridiculous amount." —RPGFan (www.rpgfan.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You have to manage your resources well, play smartly, and know when to charge ahead and when to turn back. But there's way too much left to luck in this game; some of your basic combat spells will miss up to half the time (Explodet, anyone?) while enemies have a 100% success rate . . . The field graphics are somewhat basic, but the character and monster design is undeniably charming, with a lot of series regulars making their debut . . . The music fares nicely too, with more songs than the original game . . .major props for setting the JRPG standard of multiple party members and multiple enemy groups." — Negative World (www.negativeworld.org)





Rate Dragon Warrior II
Complete the Game and Send Us a "Report Card."
Win Prizes and a Chance to be First to Play Dragon Warrior III.

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Dragon Warrior III

PUBLISHER: Enix
DEVELOPER: Chunsoft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

DRAGON WARRIOR III
An RPG of unprecedented scale and challenge, DRAGON WARRIOR III will reveal how the legend of Erdrick was born.
The Legacy of Erdrick Continues...
ENIX AMERICA CORPORATION
ENIX

As in the first two games in the series, *Dragon Warrior III* has players exploring towns, dungeons, and castles, and battling monsters to level up their characters and add to their arsenal; however, the game has more detailed graphics, better sound, more weapons, armor, and magic spells, and a more intricate story line. In addition, players can recruit three characters to their party from eight different classes: hero, soldier, pilgrim, wizard, fighter, merchant, sage, and goof-off. A nifty job system enables the changing of character classes mid-game, letting players create powerful combo characters. Other flourishes include day and nighttime travel, the ability to gamble on monster battles at fight rings, and more than 40 castles, towns, villages, and shrines to visit.

Notable Quotable:

"By balancing your team's fighting skills, defense, healing, magic, and luck, you're primed for the trials and terrors to come. Later you can custom tailor characters to beat certain obstacles . . . Mysteries, locations, and items abound . . . It's a longer, more complex game than its forerunners with lots of fresh features such as Travel Doors, which zap you across time and space to new worlds. The overhead scrolling graphics, sound, and music make the cut, but don't break the mold . . .does a great *Ultima* impression, as did the earlier games in the series." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The game is positively huge, yet well-conceived from end to end. The only complaint I can really come up with is that it is perhaps a bit too much—by the end I found myself thinking some earlier plot points had been in previous games because I had gone through them so long ago . . . This is the game where the *Dragon Warrior* formula, at least as far as gameplay, was first perfected. You have the introduction of a class system that is simple yet satisfying and pretty well nuanced . . . The party system is reminiscent of *Ultima III*, and in many ways it's a similar game except that *Dragon Warrior III* is many, many times more dense. It's mostly linear, though it does feature the requisite midgame 'gather up all the MacGuffins' quest line to mix things up a bit . . .if you're looking for an old-school, combat heavy, endurance RPG, you can certainly do worse than *Dragon Warrior III*." —Gamer Corner Blog (blog.gamercorner.net)

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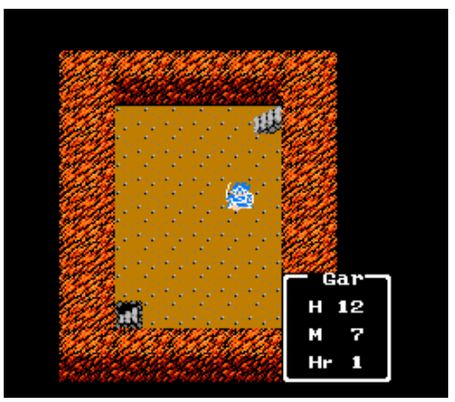
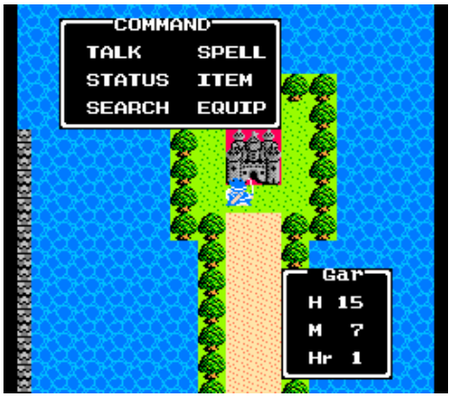
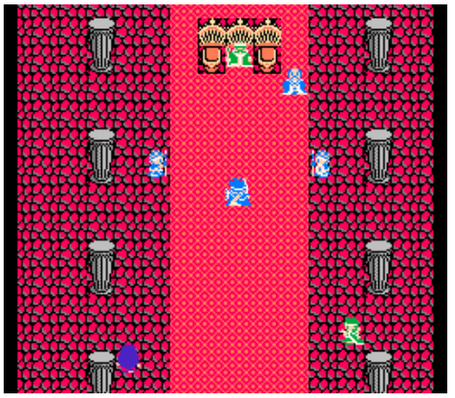






Dragon Warrior IV

PUBLISHER: Enix
DEVELOPER: Chunsoft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

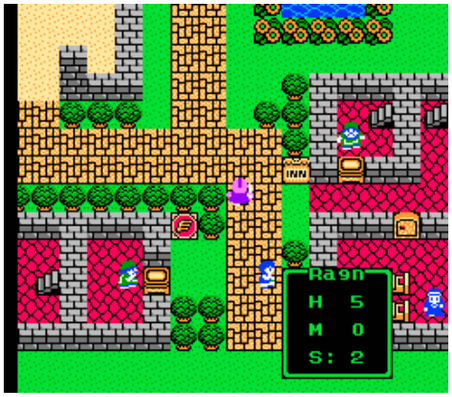
Boasting 59 spells, 36 weapons, 44 types of armor, and 5 separate chapters (The Royal Soldiers, Princess Alena's Adventure, Taloon the Arms Merchant, The Sisters of Monbaraba, and The Chosen Ones), *Dragon Warrior IV* is more epic in nature than the previous games in the series, which were already high in quality. Gameplay is similar, with players engaging in turn-based battles, exploring towns and dungeons, talking to citizens to garner clues, using gold to purchase weapons and items, selecting commands from a menu (a process that does get tedious), and more. You can even gamble for rare items at casinos and fight rings. There are now nine characters in the party, and a special tactics system lets players set the characters' positions and strategies for battle. Visually, the game evokes *Dragon Warrior III*, but the music is more diverse, as each chapter has its own distinct set of tunes.

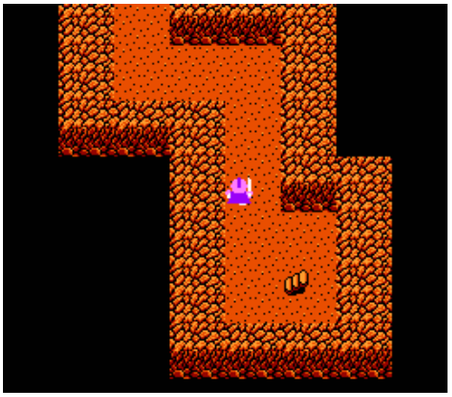
Notable Quotable:

"The story isn't particularly deep, even with the greater focus on storytelling, but it is more diverse . . . I hope you like grinding . . . Customization takes a hit with the inability to change party member names, but they're more fleshed out. Exploration has been scaled back, but the game has been given a better sense of flow . . . a terrific refinement of the series, and despite its similarities to the third game, it feels like the formula has evolved."
—Game Complaint Department (gamecomplaintdepartment.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically, *Dragon Warrior IV* shows little if any improvement over *Dragon Warrior III* . . . World graphics consist of simple terrain blocks arranged in different patterns . . . When you're in combat the monsters are remarkably well drawn, with great detail and coloring. Unfortunately, they're set against a plain black background . . . Each of the game's chapters has a set of songs written specifically for it . . . *Dragon Warrior IV*'s main strength is in the depth and scope of its game world . . . The pacing is much better than the original . . .you still have to work around the *Dragon Warrior* menu system. To open doors, talk to characters, or perform any other action you have to go to the hotspot for that appropriate action, go to the menu, then click on the appropriate verb . . .if you don't mind playing through a generic RPG system then you'll find that the game's amazingly well-developed and extended storylines go a long way toward making up for its deficiencies."
—Kyle Knight (formerly at allgame.com)





Insider Insight: I first encountered *Dragon Warrior IV* in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. The article mentioned that the Japanese release of the game caused such fervor that kids skipped school the day it came out. The series certainly didn't have that sort of effect here in the states, but it is a mainstay of the JRPG genre, and as of this writing there have been 11 numbered entries in the series and numerous spinoffs. It is as epic a quest as can be had on the NES. Wagons, ships, and even hot air balloons will carry you across multiple continents and quests. Numerous characters and a day/night cycle add realism that goes far beyond what was offered in the first installment.

One of my favorite things about it goes beyond RPG action itself—it is what comes packaged with the cartridge. Most games have a tiny instruction booklet that really isn't needed, but *Dragon Warrior IV* includes a plethora of paperwork. The instruction manual, which is called the "Explorers Handbook," is more like a novella than a booklet. There is also a poster-sized map, as well as a foldable chart showing the bestiary on one side and all the weapons, armor, and items on the other. You can play the game without these full color, nicely illustrated items—and if you have one of the remakes you will—but seeing the depth of the game in front of you adds to the allure in ways that I miss in this era of digital download gaming. —Matt Daley, co-host of the Atari 5200 Super Community podcast

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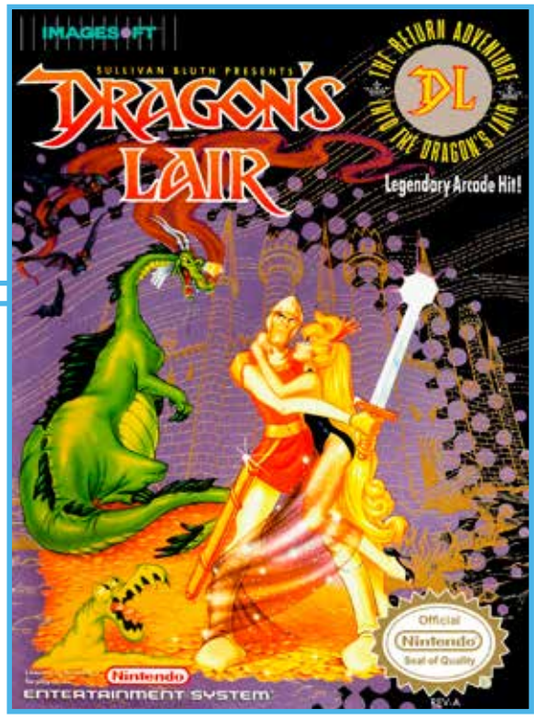
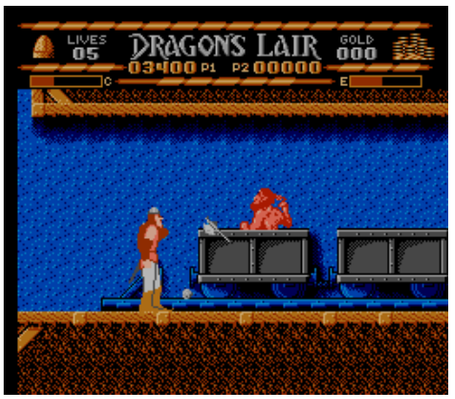
Dragon's Lair

PUBLISHER: CSG Imagesoft
DEVELOPER: MovieTime Limited
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991





Based on Cinematronics' laser disc arcade game (1983), which was basically an interactive cartoon, *Dragon's Lair* for the NES takes the more conventional side-scrolling approach, but keeps the primary aspect of the original game intact: that of having to memorize and make the right moves at exactly the right times. To rescue Princess Daphne, Dirk the Daring must use axes, candles, fireballs, daggers, and physical skills (crawling, jumping, and the like) to make it past bats, trolls, snakes, collapsing floors, descending gates, and other enemies and obstacles. Levels include Drawbridge, Entrance Hall, Treasury, Elevator Shaft, Gold Mines, Hall of the Grim Reaper, and Singe's Cavern. Side-scrolling versions of *Dragon's Lair* were also released for the Game Boy and Super Nintendo.

Memories: I'll never forget walking in to The Land of Oz arcade and seeing people gathered around an arcade cab that was running a cartoon. But it wasn't just any cartoon. It was the interactive laser disc game *Dragon's Lair*, which was stunning to behold. I love good animation, and the *DL* coin-op certainly qualifies. I could hardly believe it was a video game. Gameplay has always been king, but as kids we talked a lot about graphics—which console had the best visuals, which arcade game looked the best—but I never imagined an actual interactive cartoon. Unfortunately, I didn't care too much for the trial-and-error, memory-based, quarter-sucking gameplay. It was 50 cents, and a typical game for me only lasted a few seconds; however, I loved to watch skilled gamers play through the adventure, and that was free! Regarding the NES port, the developers should have just created a full-on platformer with *Dragon's Lair* characters. Surely it would have been better than this exercise in frustration.

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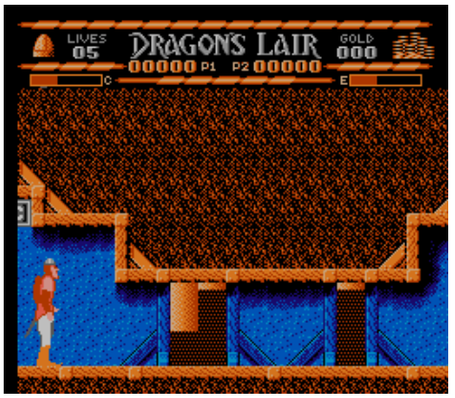
Notable Quotable:
"An odd combination of pluses and minuses. Although the plot and graphics are great, clumsy movements and no continues will leave many players extremely frustrated." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Highly detailed graphics . . . Every move has to be timed and executed perfectly. And that's a near impossibility . . .an insult to one of the most spectacular laser disc games ever . . .nice graphics and sound, but there is absolutely no gameplay to it. Dirk is animated well, but is so slow that you don't have a chance in certain parts. Very frustrating and not fun at all." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1991)



Duck Hunt

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1985

Duck Hunt is a key game in the NES library. Not only was it a system launch title, it was a pack-in cartridge with every NES console that included a Zapper light gun. Players grasp said pistol, take aim at the screen, and fire away at flying ducks or clay pigeons (depending on the option selected). Backgrounds consist of grass, hills, and trees. A second player can use the control pad to guide the ducks vertically and horizontally. Although repetitive and mindless, *Duck Hunt* is an iconic fan favorite thanks to perky sound effects, simple target shooting action, bright, cartoonish graphics, and a healthy dose of nostalgia. In the 1984 arcade Nintendo Vs version, gamers can shoot the famously annoying dog who pops up periodically and laughs at you. You'll wish you could here, too.

Notable Quotable:

"Everyone remembers *Duck Hunt*, but most people are surprised with how boring it is when they pop it in to their NES these days. This game is good for a quick five-minute nostalgia burst, but you will quickly get bored with the game and put it back on your shelf." —NES Archives (formerly at nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Duck Hunt* is a pretty clear case of a game serving a purpose. Nintendo wanted to impress with the NES Zapper controller, so they packed in a simple duck hunting game to give you something to do with the gun. It's got some cartoony animals to give it a touch of personality, but it's still all about the basic task of shooting down ducks or clay pigeons. The difficulty is a bit sloppy, and because of that you have to push through slow rounds to find a sweet spot where the challenge comes together perfectly." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Insider Insight: It's a bit of a shame, really, that the genre of light gun shooters has been virtually extinguished by "advanced" technology like LCD/LED televisions. The CRT-dependent genre was fairly prominent in arcades during its heyday, alongside cockpit-styled racers and multiplayer brawlers. They didn't always make the smoothest of transitions to home consoles (mostly due to the downsized gun controllers), but playing them in your living room always felt like a party, as though you had your own indoor shooting gallery.

Light gun video games have been around since the days of the Magnavox Odyssey, and even then they were ultimately an electronic adaptation of the classic carnival shooting gallery, a mechanical amusement that's been around since the nineteenth century. While Nintendo may not have invented the light gun video game genre, the NES helped bring

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it into the mainstream of video gaming. Seemingly such a simple concept with only one screen, two sprites and, quite literally, one-button gameplay, *Duck Hunt* was incredibly accessible and enjoyable to a broad audience: all you had to do was point and click. It's little wonder that Nintendo made the game a pack-in title for two different NES retail bundles, technically making the game one of the most popular and best-selling titles on the system.

Originally designed by Takehiro Izushi and produced by Gunpei Yokoi, *Duck Hunt* is a fairly straightforward game design: use the NES Zapper to shoot ducks flushed out of the reeds by your trusty, but tactless, hound dog. Miss too many ducks in a session and it's game over, while man's best friend audibly laughs at you. Interestingly, in the Nintendo Vs. arcade version of the game you could accidentally shoot that snickering mutt during a bonus level; sadly this bonus level is nowhere to be found in the console game, and despite the fact that the game's manual specifically warns the player not to d[illegible] dog can't actually be harmed on the [illegible]. However, the dog actually makes a cameo appearance in another great NES Zapper game, *Barker Bill's Trick Shooting*, in which the player can exact sweet, sweet revenge on the smug pooch to their heart's content.

Missing nuances and simplistic design aside, *Duck Hunt* remains a full-featured game that includes both one-duck and two-duck modes, plus a skeet shoot mode with clay pigeons (that more often than not felt considerably more difficult than just blasting waterfowl with birdshot). The game even has a few secrets, such as the unofficial two-player mode: in the single-duck game, the ducks can actually be controlled with the second-player controller, turning what is supposedly easy mode into a ridiculously fun way to lose friends and enrage loved ones!

Speaking of enraged loved ones, *Duck Hunt* has always been the video game of choice for my dad. He was never much of a gamer, but I remember the first time he ever played *Duck Hunt* while visiting some cousins. He and a couple of my uncles seemingly played the game all night, taking turns downing mallards and cursing that dog well into the early morning hours. *Duck Hunt* sold him on the idea of a home video game console, and sure enough, a few months later, despite being flat broke and our family still living in a tiny two-bedroom apartment after a recent cross-country move, Santa Claus somehow delivered one of the happiest Christmases I can remember. Thirty years later and I still have that same NES, along with hundreds of cartridges that I've since collected over the decades. The NES is still my favorite console of all time, and funny enough, it probably wouldn't have ever been so without my dear old dad playing *Duck Hunt* all those years ago. Thanks, Dad! —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

Insider Insight: As a young girl I was fascinated and disgusted by my teenaged uncle. He was more like an older brother to me, or a strange creature comprised mostly of gas and junk food. While he took on the serious responsibility of teasing and terrifying me—sitting me on top of the refrigerator so I couldn't get down and sitting me in front of horror movies for hours on end—he also introduced me to my very first video game.

Neil lived in the attic of my grandparents' home. I remember attempting to sneak up the creaky wooden stairs, crawling through the tangle of shag carpet and crouching at the end of his bed to marvel at his Nintendo. I wasn't supposed to be up there. Not when he wasn't home. Not when he was home and had friends over. Not when he was home and didn't want to be bothered. There was some magic coordination of prerequisites that would sometimes align and result in him saying, "Hey! You wanna shoot some ducks?"

Duck Hunt was the first video game I ever saw. I had sometimes watched Neil play from the secret safety of the top of his stairs, feeling like a criminal spy after successfully scaling each squeaky step without being caught. The first time I saw him point the orange and grey gun at the TV and pull the trigger, the first time I saw the pixelated flapping duck—Quack, Flap, Flap, Quack—freeze with a vacant look of surprise on its blocky face and then drop to the eagerly awaiting dog, I couldn't breathe.

Wide-eyed and afraid of being noticed, I watched in silence as the dog victoriously lifted each dead bird above his head with a beaming smile. Eventually—TWO DUCKS—one in each triumphant paw! And then it happened . . .BLAM BLAM BLAM, Flap, Quack, Flap, Flap . . .the duck flew off screen, the screen blinked briefly a light golden orange, and then Neil's trusty hunting companion laughed at him. I was so outraged and astonished that I gasped audibly. Neil turned toward me, but I was still locked on the screen. How could the dog betray him that way? Mock him? And then I noticed how royally pissed Neil was. That 8-bit dog laughing made him angry.

I didn't cover my mouth and snicker into my hands as the hound had, but I laughed. I laughed even though I knew each joyous burst of air may be my last. And that was when he said, "Oh yeah? You think you could do better?" And eventually I did. After hours of sitting on the scratchy carpet in the stuffy attic shooting two-player *Duck Hunt* with my uncle, I had my first perfect game. Then another. Each time Neil giving me a "not bad" or a "nice job" before we retreated to the kitchen for a celebratory Twin Pop. Eventually Neil called me up to his room while his friends were there, to show off the success of his training. "I bet my niece can beat you." And I would. In your face, Stianche! Suck it, Frank!

Recently Neil asked if we'd like an old tube TV from my grandmother's house. My husband set it up in our basement and we set out to an antique store to buy a working Nintendo and guns. Nothing quite compares to the thrill of the thud as a digital duck bites the dust, or the rage brought on by the giggle of that double-crosser dog. Our son now knows the joy and frustration that is *Duck Hunt*. Thanks, Neil. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

DuckTales

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

The world's wealthiest aquatic fowl is always on the lookout for more riches. When he hears of five ancient treasures buried around the world and beyond, he immediately sets off to find them. You control Scrooge McDuck as he goes on what may be the most dangerous money-grubbing spree of his life. *DuckTales* takes you through five exotic environments: the Amazon, Transylvania, African mines, Himalayas, and the Moon. You can play the worlds in the order you desire. Levels are filled with secret rooms, tricky pitfalls, dangerous traps, and an assortment of troublemakers, including villains, ruffians, and creatures. To open treasure chests, make long jumps, and defeat gorillas, natives, spiders, and other enemies (including boss Magica DeSpell), Scrooge is equipped with an unconventional, fun-to-use weapon: a walking cane that performs a golf swing attack and a pogo jumping/attacking maneuver. Certain friends and family members of Scrooge are on hand to help in the quest for treasure. Huey, Dewey, Louie, and Webby dish out helpful hints, Bubba Duck presents a special treasure, and Mrs. Beakly offers Scrooge a delicious treat. Collectibles include coins for invulnerability, food for restoring hit points, and dolls for extra lives. Once you have found all five treasures you will enter a final battle to protect your riches from a dastardly villain. Cute graphics and theme music complement the excellent gameplay.

Memories: I didn't play this game until the late 2000s, when I was doing research for the second volume in my *Classic Home Video Games* book series. I had always heard it was great but didn't get the chance to play it. I don't recall why I didn't just rent it, as there were plenty of video stores near my house. Now I'm enjoying the remastered version on the Wii U.

Notable Quotable:

"This game has good graphics and a nice feel with plenty of emphasis on the cartoon-like characters. *DuckTales* is not overly challenging but the theme is different, and the game is fun to play. Don't get scared by the kiddie look; this is a prime example of very good game designing." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Back in the 1940s, a Walt Disney artist named Carl Barks invented a new character for Disney Comic books: Scrooge McDuck. On the surface Scrooge was a miserly old curmudgeon. But as the character evolved, Barks revealed the old skinflint to have a heart of purest gold. Barks often sent Scrooge (usually with Donald Duck and nephews in tow) on epic adventures based on themes adapted from the classic myths of many lands . . . Capcom's *DuckTales* delightfully captures the spirit of those adventures . . . It's evident that whomever created the graphics for this game really studied the Barks originals: The style is clean, bright, and full of visual humor . . .a perfect Nintendo game for younger players." —*Game Players* (October 1989)

Insider Insight: The *DuckTales* soundtrack still gets me pumped whenever I hear it. I was a huge fan of the cartoon and the comics so the game was a natural need for me. The music in the video game? Somehow even more energizing than the cartoon! It rivals *Super Mario Bros.* as the best video game theme. Scrooge is a badass throughout the game, crushing enemies with his cane and hoarding treasures from around the globe. I asked for a pogo stick after playing this. I never saw the appeal of one before, but once you've seen McDuck bounce his way through Transylvania you start to feel like you're missing out.

What I loved most about *DuckTales* is the nonlinear gameplay, which reminded me of the more challenging arcade games I'd played. I loved the freedom to move through levels in whichever order I chose, and to explore above and below the screen instead of just side-scrolling like most of the other NES games I played. The only thing I didn't like was the brief portrayal of Gizmoduck on the moon as a potential enemy; if you aren't paying close attention it seems as if he's shooting at you. Luckily, he's just blasting the path for Scrooge to defeat the real villain. Many of the cartoon characters have cameos in the game and there are so many fun areas to explore. *Duck Tales* has tons of replay value. It's also challenging enough that my years of practice unfortunately give me no advantage when playing it now with my son. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

DuckTales 2

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

Released four years after the original game, *DuckTales 2* is similar to its progenitor (which is a good thing, since *DuckTales* was excellent), but with a few new uses for Scrooge McDuck's walking cane weapon, such as pulling blocks and grabbing onto latches. Player assume the role of Disney's greedy, treasu ng duck as he runs, climbs, and pogo j through five levels of play: Niagara, Bermuda, Mu, Scotland, and Egypt. There are obstacles to avoid (spikes, fireballs, logs, and the like), rafts to ride, bosses to fight (including Fire Duck and Mummy Duck), items to purchase (such as continues and health), and much more. Stabbing downward with the pogo stick to kill enemies (crabs, frogs, mice, knights, pirates, etc.) is as satisfying as ever. The ultimate goal is to find seven map pieces hidden within each level. Collecting all of them will unlock a bonus area leading to the McDuck family treasure. Produced in the waning years of the NES—meaning it's much harder to find than the original game—*DuckTales 2* is one of the better sequels for the system.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"*DuckTales 2* makes a great game even better by retaining the gameplay and pleasant visual style of the original while improving control of Scrooge's pogo jump." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

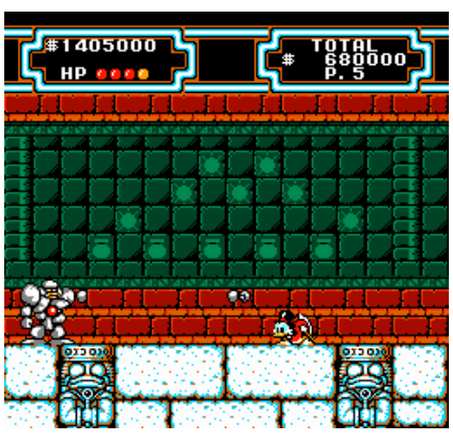
"The action has a nice pace, and the graphics are rendered well for an 8-bitter . . . There are plenty of mysteries to solve and hidden levels to find. The graphics are cute, sound is bearable, and the gameplay is excellent." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1993)

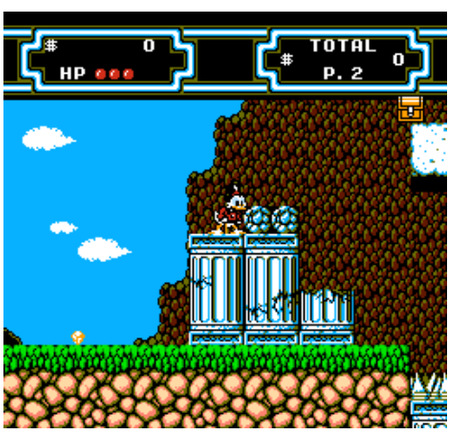
Notable Quotable:

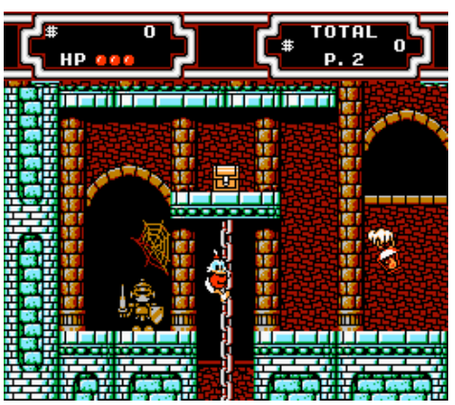
"One only needs to hold the A and B buttons to perform the pogo-cane attack . . . Huey, Dewey, and Louie are much more important . . . Their obvious suggestions have been replaced by puzzle solving clues . . . the occasional series of levers and hidden passages are a welcome change from *D1* . . . End of the level bosses are also more of a challenge . . .even with these additions, *D2* just isn't as cool as *D1*. The levels in *D2* are richer than *D1*, offering puzzle solving as well as the multi-tiered vine climbing, and yet *D2*'s stages aren't as interesting. Everything in *D2* seems more complicated but less engaging . . .most of *D2* is a drab brown, while *D1* offered lots of color." —Ryan DiGiorgi (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The additions are very smart and used effectively throughout the entire game . . . The levels are significantly larger with much more to do. There aren't as many random hidden gems, but there are more treasures that give a significant boost in cash . . . *DuckTales* was notoriously easy, and the sequel is notably more difficult . . . The boss battles are a clear step up from the simplicity of the first game. They require more hits and have more erratic patterns . . .slightly longer than its predecessor but still short . . . While *DuckTales 2* looks great, it is still only a marginal improvement over the first game . . . *DuckTales* had a brilliant score and this game's soundtrack is completely forgettable. It's a damn shame *DuckTales 2* was released late, as it is truly great." —Classic-Games.net (www.classic-games.net)







Dudes with Attitude

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Michael and Cam Crick
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

Deceptively titled and hard to find, *Dudes with Attitude* is a simple, old-school game in which players guide one of six different bouncing smiley faces around a [illegible] of 32 different non-scrolling rooms, bu[illegible]nto diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other treasures to collect them. Passing through an "attitude converter" changes the face into one of six different colors, and only treasures the color of the smiley face will be collected when touched. Obstacles include mines, walls, serpent sentries, star-a-lizers, and jaws. To eliminate an obstacle the face must be the same color. An edit mode lets players design their own levels in this highly original (and certainly playable) but primitive looking game. American Video Entertainment later released *Dudes with Attitude* as *Trolls on Treasure Island*, but with character designs based on the then-popular troll dolls.

Notable Quotable:

"Since the basic concept is so weak, the developers decided to complicate matters by incorporating invisible walls (ugh!) and special icons that wreak havoc on the controls (*gah!*). It's impossible to cross 'water blocks' without first touching a *boat* icon. Who in their right mind could have possibly thought this was a good idea? The game quickly progresses from a mindless romp to a full-blown headache, and a 'hip attitude' is unconvincing to say the least. *Dudes with Attitude* has an option to create your own levels, but even if I were stranded on a desert island with this game I could find something better to do with my time." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A frenetic action puzzler hybrid that combined uniquely distinctive innovation with the usual pitfalls and pratfalls of small time development operations . . . The gameplay emphasizes quick thinking, requiring excellent reaction timing and rapid decision-making skills, along with some planning in later levels . . . With the heavy use of blues, whites, blacks, and pinks this looks like an old four-color CGA PC game, which is a bad thing . . . The sound effects are simplistic buzzes and beeps . . . The constant, frenetic, horizontally oriented gameplay is a marked departure from the vertically oriented, slow-at-times, one-piece-at-a-time material that many old-school gamers may be used to from such classic titles as *Tetris* or *Dr. Mario* . . .feels like old PC shareware, something perhaps briefly played as a curiosity but at a noticeable drop in quality from the bulk majority of NES cartridges." —Eric Bailey (obsoletegamer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"An early puzzle game, but a very good one . . .if you beat the preset levels, it gets boring, but who said you had to play the preset levels all the time? Yes, that's right, you can make your OWN levels!!" —GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

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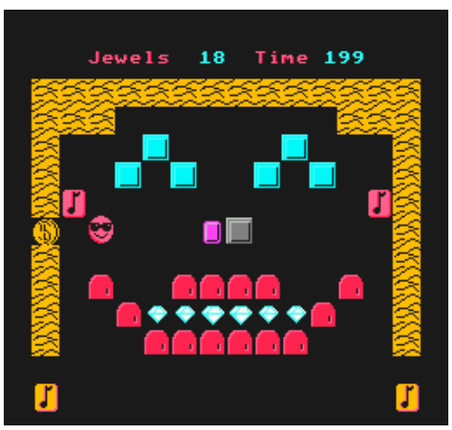
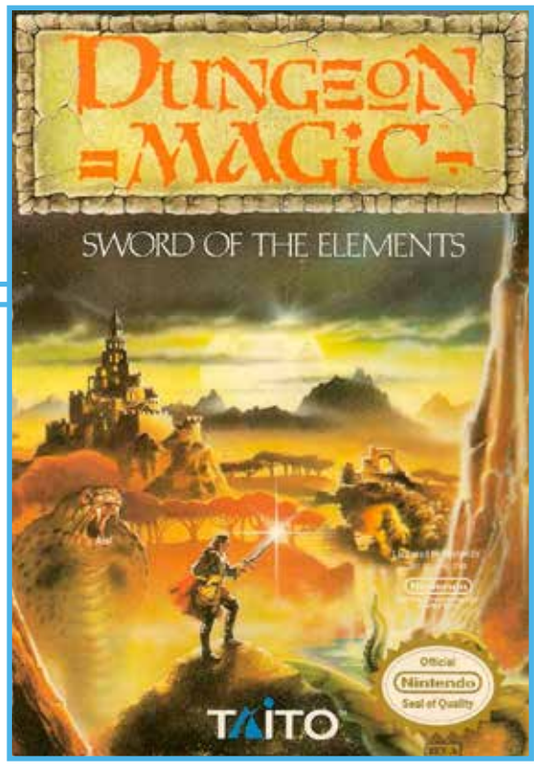
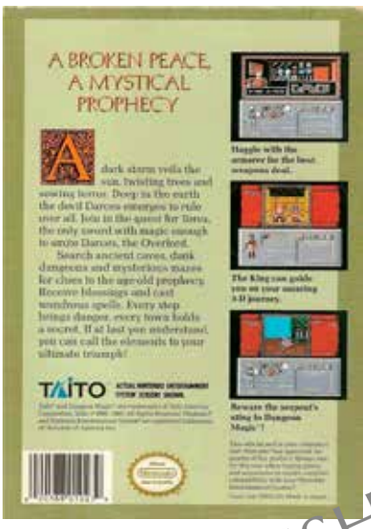


Dungeon Magic: Sword of the Elements

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Natsume
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990





In *Dungeon Magic*, players assume the role of a brave adventurer searching for Magi's five elemental swords, plus the sixth blade, the Sword of Tores—the only weapon powerful enough to defeat Darces the Overlord. As in many RPGs battling evil creatures increases the player's experience, which in turn increases ability and strength. Many monsters and magicians carry gold, which can be used to purchase weapons, armor, healing potions, magic powders, and other helpful items. Throughout the course of the hours-long adventure players will cast magic spells, visit merchants, use keys to open doors and treasure chests, and search caves, dungeons, mazes, and towns. Graph paper is recommended for keeping track of various locations and items. The game looks similar to *Wizardry*, but instead of turn-based combat you battle enemies in real time. You strike with the A button and back away to try and parry hits.

Notable Quotable:

"Probably the most difficult RPG I've ever played . . .the overworld, dungeons, and towns are sprawling and completely featureless. There is a map spell, but learning it is tricky and involves some trial and error, and it doesn't work in town. Also, the dungeons are quite maze-like with lots of back and forth between levels, so even a map doesn't solve them entirely . . . The magic system is cryptic . . . The status effects are murder. Poison rapidly drains you, your stats are often halved, and monsters use these liberally. Coupled with losing health for curing yourself, even when you reach max level the weakest monsters are still a nuisance." —The Last Human Family (lasthumanfamily.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Natsume's decision to make *Dungeon Magic* a first-person RPG leaves the game nigh unplayable. The NES can't even begin to handle that perspective, and it's disheartening to see developers think they're going to be the ones to pull it off . . . The game won't load anything until you're almost upon it, which means you'll be navigating an endless sea of blue until a wall, or person, or enemy gets in your direct line of sight. When I did manage to get out of the initial town and into a castle, navigating the unwieldy menu system was like jabbing a thousand forks into my shins. Why can't I just run up to a door and have it open for me? Why do I have to slam into an enemy with my sword, move backwards, then repeat this mechanic?" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

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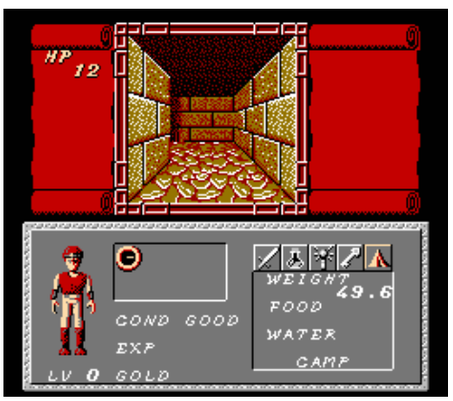
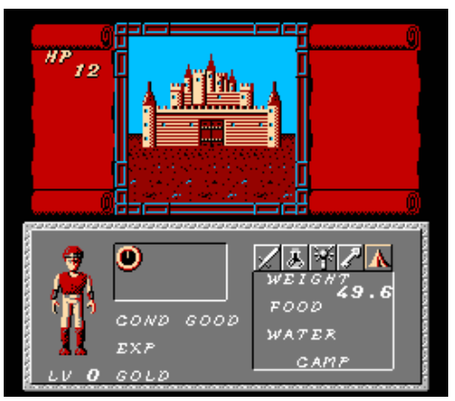
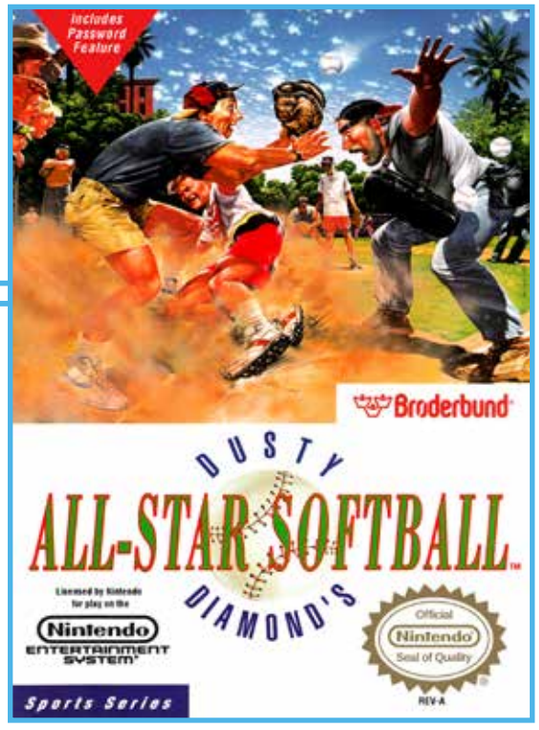




Dusty Diamond's All-Star Softball

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Softball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



This quirky, arcade-style softball game lets players select from 60 different oddly designed, big-headed softball players (including a punk, a witch, and a devil), some of whom have unorthodox bats (such as a broom or an axe) and/or skills (such as flying or climbing fences). There are fast and slow pitch games and six different ball fields (Sandlot, Park, Cliff, School, Island, and Professional), most of which are littered by such obstacles as rocks, posts, sand, and/or water. The game also includes pinch runners, pinch hitters, steals (fast pitch only), and diving catches. Easy to control and a blast to play, *Dusty Diamond's All-Star Softball* is a bona fide cult classic. It stands out as an interesting and hard-to-find game in a sea of common, less desirable sports cartridges.

Notable Quotable:

"A real gem of a baseball game . . . plays 95% like regular baseball, but there are a few minor rule changes. Foul balls are considered outs, and it's possible to catch the ball well beyond the 'home run line.' Unlike regular baseball, the gameplay is fast and entertaining . . . Perhaps the best part of the game is its wacky playing fields, located in six interesting locations including a cliff, an island, and a schoolyard. Each has its own little quirks that add an element of unpredictability." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the most entertaining games of baseball/softball ever conceived. Definitely a game that didn't get its deserved amount of credit . . . Not only can you pick your entire squad (and name it), but also the area you play in, each with its own ground rules. Break a window at the schoolyard and it's an automatic out. Have a ball roll off the cliff at the . . .uh . . .cliff and it's a ground rule double. The final team is composed entirely of impossible-to-beat women . . . Crude is the only way to describe how this game looks . . . It's amusing to see players step up to the box swinging maces, pick-axes, and brooms, but the actual players look hilariously bad" —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The diversity and uniqueness of *Dusty Diamond* make it thoroughly entertaining, though frustrating to play. You may feel like kicking your TV when, after perfectly positioning your outfielder to catch a long fly ball, he lets it drop to his feet. After looking up his description in the instruction manual you'll find that he 'can hit the long ball, but constant errors make him unreliable' . . . The computer teams always have a plentiful supply of pitchers who can throw some nasty breaking balls. Meanwhile, your hurlers will get hammered because their curve balls look too much like fastballs. Go for a closer, more entertaining gameplay against friends instead." —*Game Players* (August 1990)

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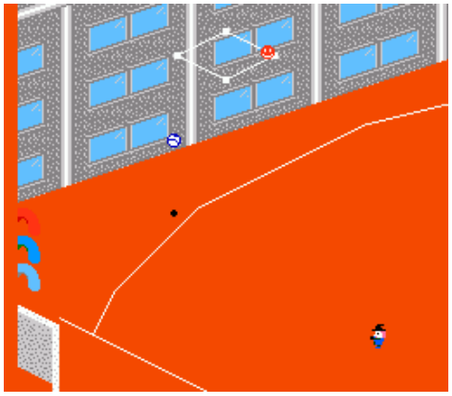
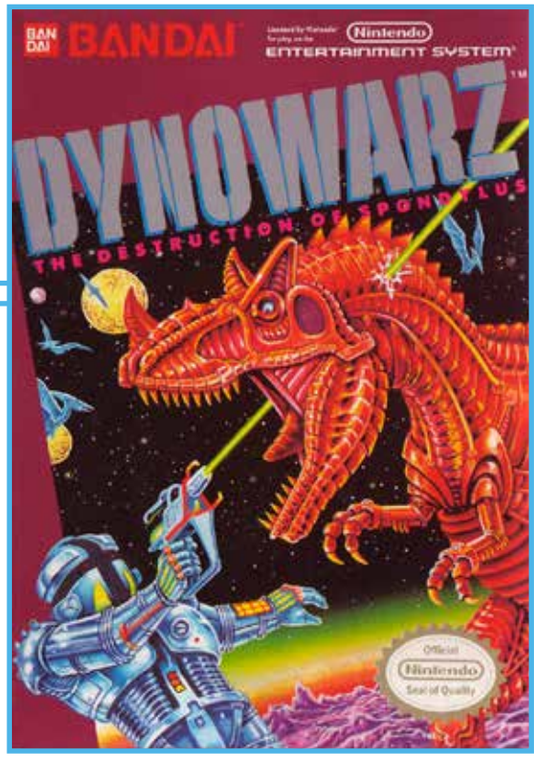
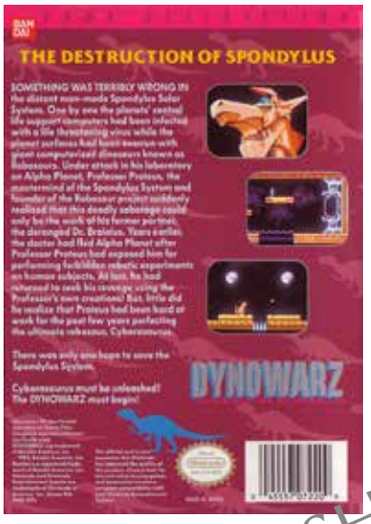


Dynowarz: The Destruction of Spondylus

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Advance Communication
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990





In *Dynowarz* the manmade Spondylus Solar System is under attack, and it's up to the player, as Professor Proteus, to vanquish this threat. Armed with a spread gun, the professor must battle robotic dinosaurs (some of which fly), hop on vertically and horizontally moving platforms, jump over chasms, and dodge spikes, mines, and cannons. Periodically, control will switch to a Mechagodzilla-like dinosaur that can punch, launch fist projectiles, lob bombs (which, annoyingly enough, oftentimes go right over enemies), and shoot fireballs and lasers. The dino stages are less platform intensive but both phases are easy, thanks to a long energy bar that makes it possible to just trample over spikes and through enemies without worrying too much about taking damage. Sparse backgrounds, delayed jumping (the characters squat first), and short levels add to the game's ineptitude.

Notable Quotable:

"*Dynowarz* is basically *Blaster Master*, except replace the car Sophia with a giant killer T-Rex in space . . . The sections where you are a person are fairly poor. You have a gun and you jump like you are on the moon . . . While the Dynosaur bits should have been the most badass parts, they're actually a hunk of hot garbage. Attacks feel weak and have horrible range. It's hard to even attack enemies without getting hit back . . .what's even worse is the pits and jumping. The cutscenes when you get into your Dyno and at the end are straight up awesome, but the rest of the game is kind of a blurry, pixelated mess. Nearly every planet's background is just a black, starry sky, with no mountains, or hills, or background of any kind . . . Tunes are tinny and entirely unmemorable, though not offensive." —Nathan Major (sharkberg.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A quick glance at the manual reveals the plot to be nearly identical to *Mega Man* . . . Because the dragon can take an insane number of hits, and the enemies also take way too many to kill, you're just as well off ignoring them altogether and trudging through the entire featureless stage until you reach the boss—most of which can be destroyed by getting up close and punching repeatedly . . . While the spaceman stages are marginally better, that's nothing to brag about . . . The graphics are lazily implemented. At one point you pass by a long line of the same exact red planets all in a row. Most of the dinosaur designs, including your own, are uninspired . . .not all games that looked incredibly cool in those old magazine reviews are all they were cracked up to be." —Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

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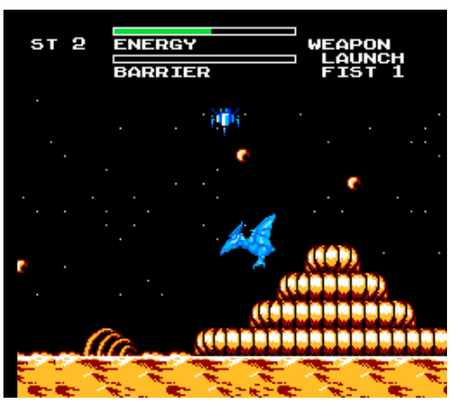
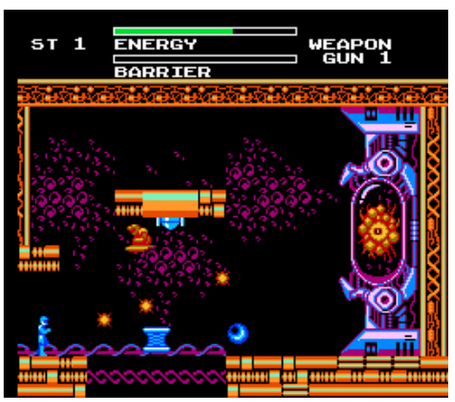
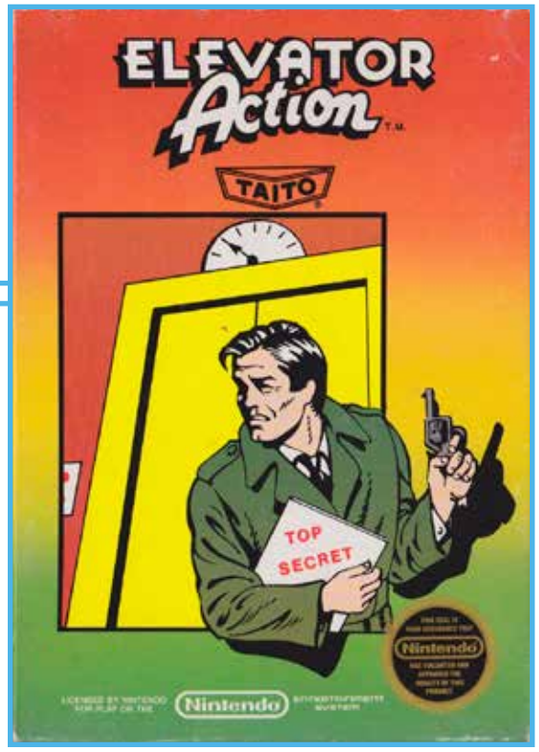




Elevator Action

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Micronics
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987



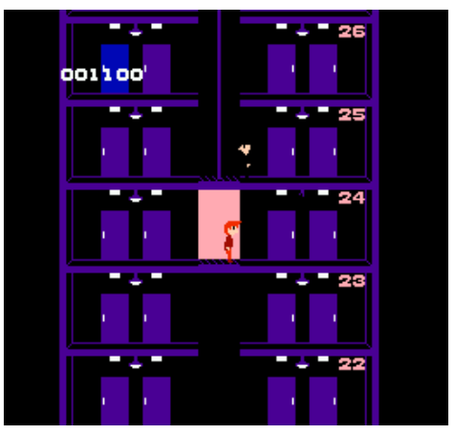
Although slightly slower paced, *Elevator Action* is a fantastic port of Taito's 1983 arcade game. The color scheme is a bit different, and the music is a notch or two below in terms of quality, but the graphics and gameplay are virtually identical. As super-sleuth Agent 17, codename "Otto," you must protect the security of the country by sneaking through a heavily guarded enemy defense building to steal secret government documents. Beginning from the rooftop, you make your way cautiously up and down elevators (be careful, as you can get crushed by elevators and fall down elevator shafts) and escalators and across floors, shooting and jump-kicking armed security guards. You can duck under and jump over enemy bullets. For extra points you can shoot lamps to darken rooms. The goal is to pick up all the files hidden behind the red doors and make it to the getaway car in the garage below. Enemy agents await behind blue doors to ambush you.

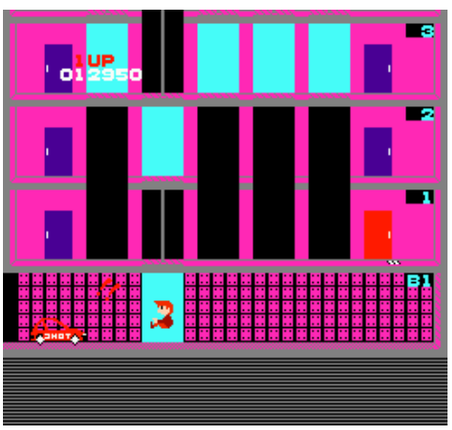
Memories: I enjoyed *Elevator Action* in the arcades but played it more on the NES. It just seemed more like a console game to me for some reason, probably because I wasn't very good at it and needed the practice of playing at home without using quarters. Interestingly, the Game Boy port lets you acquire more weapons, including grenades, a shotgun, and a rapid-fire machine gun. The Game Boy version also features guard dogs and robot enemies.

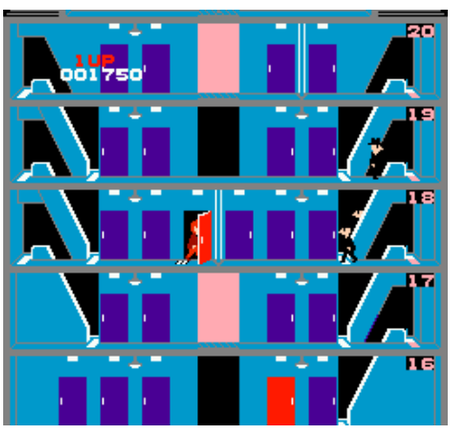
Notable Quotable:
"It will definitely please fans of the classic coin-op game . . .very faithful, both in graphics and play action." —*Computer Entertainer* (September 1987)

Notable Quotable:
"A decent game for around 10 minutes, but then you'll probably get annoyed by the limited gameplay and stiff controls that are usually responsible for your deaths. The core mechanics are briefly enjoyable, but more variety and polish was needed." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"The game controls pretty poorly, from requiring you to press up to get out of a crouch to having to not only stand in the exact right spot and be facing the right direction to enter red doors or hop on an escalator. These control problems will get you killed when agents are hot on your tail . . .bare bones graphics and sounds . . . Everything is represented clearly, but there is no detail on anything . . .garish and boring color palette. This could nearly pass for a high-end Atari 2600 game. Sprites are extremely basic, and animation is made up of no more than two frames. Sound is equally disappointing. The gunshot is the only satisfying sound effect, as everything else is basic bloops and bleeps. There's a single music track that plays throughout the entire game which loops after about 15 seconds. What's worse is that it utilizes a single instrument." —Steemit (steemit.com)



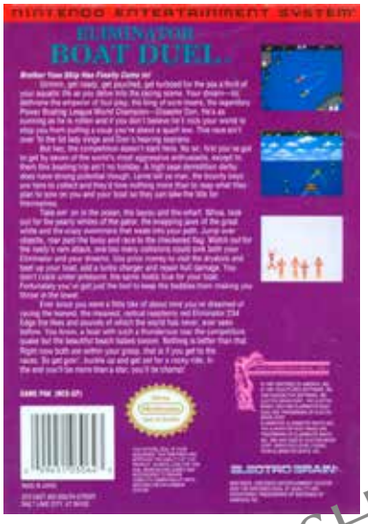




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Eliminator Boat Duel

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software/Radioactive Software
GAME TYPE: Boat/Watercraft Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



In the overhead view segments of *Eliminator Boat Duel* players, driving a speedboat, race up twisting, turning waterways dodging or jumping over such obstacles as alligators, sharks, and whirlpools while rescuing people and grabbing nitro boosts and cash. In addition to jumping over obstacles the boats can jump on each other, a maneuver that was probably inspired by *Bump 'n' Jump*. When the action switches to the faster, less cluttered, behind-the-boat perspective, players race atop open waters, trying to stay between pairs of flags while grabbing speed boosts and jumping the occasional ramp. Between races prize money can be used to make repairs and upgrade boats with faster engines, sturdier hulls, and improved steering. There are 25 different races, taking place in such settings as the bayou, wharf, and ocean. Races are against such colorful characters as Seasick Sydney, Weird Willey, and Veronica Alabaster. Despite a limited color palette the game has nicely detailed graphics.

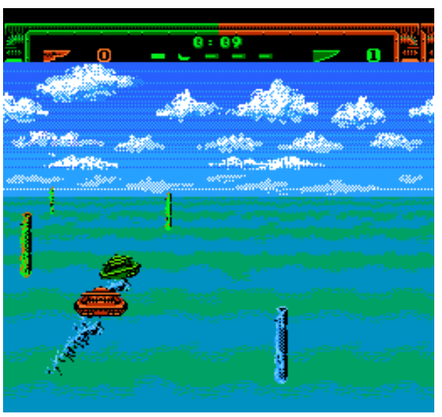
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"There's a nice sense of speed, and the layered clouds overhead look lovely . . . The rich scenery includes shimmering water, swimmers, and cabins on the shore . . . The action becomes especially intense as the boats jockey for position near the finish . . . The game only has one glaring flaw, and that's how it abruptly ends after a player loses three races. A score or some indicator of your performance would have been nice, but instead you just see an ugly 'GAME OVER' screen. It's a blemish on an otherwise first-rate boat racer." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

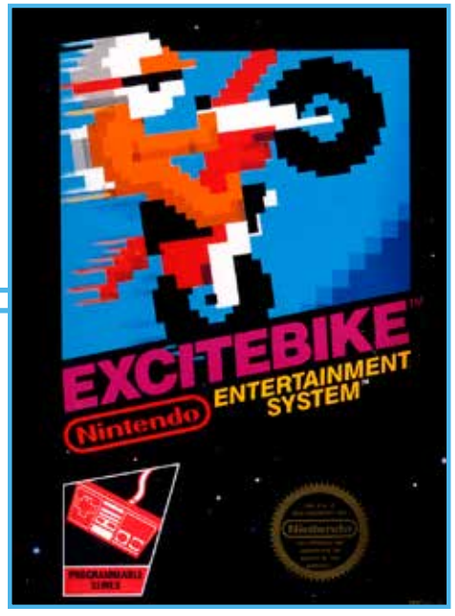
Notable Quotable:

"Solid controls, which is essential for a good racing title. Early on you'll note that the steering feels tight, but in later stages sharp turns will have you rue the moment you made such a declaration. Fear not, a simple upgrade of your turning radius will put you right back into buttery-smooth handling . . .while some may desire a broader array of scenery, the inherent variety found in the game's mechanics will more than make up for any deficiency in backdrops . . . The music is fun and charming. It's quirky, weird, kinda grungy at times, and yeah, kind of laggy. Some may not dig it, but I sure do." —Nerdbacon (nerdbacon.com)



Excitebike

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1985



A favorite among early NES owners, despite the exclusion of the bonus rounds from Nintendo's 1984 arcade original, *Excitebike* is a side-scrolling motocross game in which you race on tracks containing hills, ramps (of varying shapes and sizes), obstacles, and mud pits. Keys to the game include using the turbo button judiciously (without overheating the bike) and, during jumps (which are surprisingly enjoyable to pull off), positioning the bike up and down on the track and raising or lowering the front wheel at the most effective angles for distance and smooth landings. You can select from a solo run, which pits you against the clock, or compete against computer-controlled bikers. As part of the system's "Programmable Series" of cartridges, the game includes a special Design Mode that lets you create your own courses. The manual states that "the save and load menu options are not operable in this game," meaning you can't save the courses you've created.

Memories: I got my copy of *Excitebike* early in 1988, after receiving an NES Control Deck for Christmas 1987. I bought it with money I earned delivering copier machines. I loved the game and played it for hours and hours. I especially enjoyed how you had to tilt the bike forward to make smooth landings on the ramps, but it wasn't my first experience with designing my own playfields. Years prior I created custom mazes in *K.C. Munchkin!* for the Odyssey2.

Notable Quotable:
"*Excitebike* is a short but challenging game that still plays extremely well today. The gameplay mechanics have real depth that were ahead of their time, and the addition of a track designer makes this an early classic in the NES library." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"Racing games have been around in many shapes and guises for several years, and although this is very playable, it tires steadily as you play. Being so easy to play and master it may appeal more to younger people, but we doubt whether there is much lasting appeal for hardened arcade or racing fans." —*The Games Machine* (December 1987)

Notable Quotable:
"Even if motocross doesn't appeal to you whatsoever *Excitebike* is a blast to play. With obstacles to avoid and tricks to perform, the race to the finish is full of—pardon the pun—excitement, and the track editor is icing on the cake. It's no surprise that Nintendo wants to hearken back to it with the Wii's *Excite Truck*." —*Video Game Collector* #7 (Winter, 2007)

Notable Quotable:
"*Excitebike* has enough track features to provide an entertaining, if dated game . . . My first impressions of *Excitebike* were not too good. I've seen scores of similar products before, and the 3D perspective games have largely taken over from them. But this race game has the advantage of a course designer and a large range of objects." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1987)

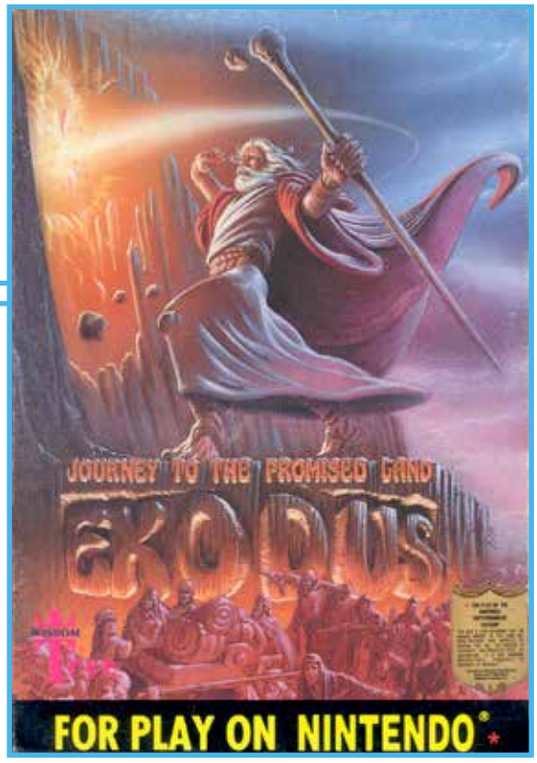
Insider Insight: *Excitebike* was probably the first NES game I ever played, and I played it before the console saw the light of day on store shelves in North America. I'm sure at least some readers remember the Nintendo VS. cabinets that appeared in arcades in 1984. There was a *VS. Excitebike* cabinet in the food court at a local shopping center. My mom would always take me when she went, and was kind enough to give me whatever quarters she had in her purse. I'd get two slices from the pizza place, hurriedly wolf them down, then beg for the quarters and rush to the games placed along the wall. To this day I associate *VS. Excitebike* with the smell of pizza sauce.

Nintendo took a simple motorcycle race and made it so much more with *Excitebike*. There's a lot of jumping, thanks to the ramps spaced out over the track, and you can shift your weight forward or backward on the bike mid-air. Landing the bike correctly is crucial—too far either direction and your rider will take a spill, wasting precious seconds as they run to retrieve it. Hammering on the buttons makes the rider run faster, so even this part of the game has player interaction. There's a bit of strategy also, as the B button makes the bike accelerate faster than the A button, but can cause the engine to overheat. Keeping an eye on the engine heat is an unusual play mechanic, and trying to keep your bike at top speed without blowing it up takes a lot of concentration. There's always the feeling that you can do just a bit better next time—and I still pop this cart in from time to time to see how I do. —Matt Daley, co-host of the Atari 5200 Super Community podcast

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Exodus: Journey to the Promised Land

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree
DEVELOPER: Wisdom Tree
GAME TYPE: Maze/Maze Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991



A game that *Bomberman* fans should enjoy, *Exodus: Journey to the Promised Land* uses the same game engine as *Crystalmines*, but is retrofitted with a biblical theme. Players guide Moses as he walks the pathways of 100 timed grid-based, maze-like rooms, including such elements as impenetrable walls, pushable squares, and falling boulders. Moses uses his staff and the "word of God" (a firing mechanism) to ward off magicians, soldiers, taskmasters, and other enemies, and to remove such obstacles as the murmurings of Israel, the weaknesses of man, and the golden calf of sin. To complete a level and make the exit appear Moses, who walks in eight directions, must grab five question marks and the manna quota. Holy oil, new sandals, and other items aid Moses in his quest, which does contain puzzle elements. There are 250 trivia questions, all based on the book of *Exodus*. Each question you answer correctly earns you a Bible, and once you collect 10 you get an extra life. Unlicensed and hard to find. See also: *Joshua and The Battle of Jericho*.

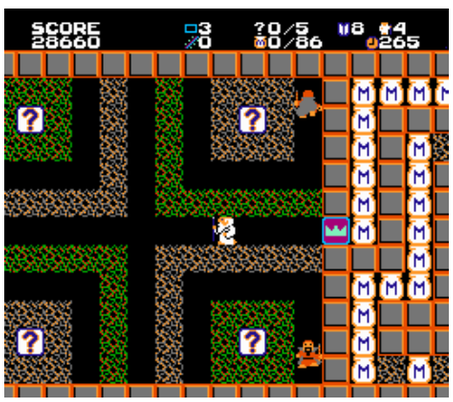
Notable Quotable:

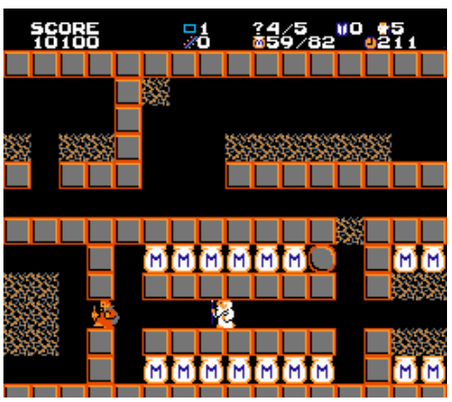
"I grew up going to Sunday School, and the story of Moses and the Israelites was probably in the top five of every kid's favorite Bible stories. There's everything: political drama, murder, betrayal, miracles upon miracles. *Exodus* . . .scraps all of the awesomeness in the actual book of Exodus and replaces it with hardened cow patties . . . Instead of making a game out of events of *Exodus*, Wisdom Tree decided what gamers really wanted was a collect-a-thon, and a boring one at that . . . The music is the worst offense in a game stuffed to the brim with abominable content. "Father Abraham" is the one and only piece of music, and it is played repeatedly until you poke out your eardrums or turn down the TV." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

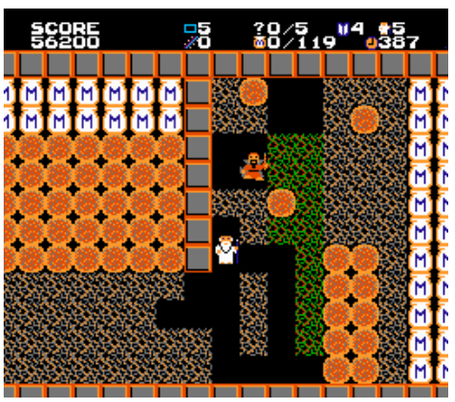
Notable Quotable:

"Out of all of the Wisdom Tree games that I've played I think *Exodus* is the most fun. It reminded me a lot of *Dig Dug*, which is one of my favorite arcade classics . . .be ready for an epic challenge, as it's got a lot of levels and gets surprisingly hard. This may seem like a Sunday school game, but it would surely take an adult mind to complete some of the later puzzles lurking on the way to the Promised Land . . .looked terrible in 1991 and it still looks terrible in 2016 . . . For a story that's been around for 4,000-something years, maybe they could've implemented it a little more dramatically than with a simple on-screen paragraph . . . It may seem like the Bible trivia is there as an afterthought, but you'll actually need as many extra lives as you can get." —The Well Red Mage (thewellredmage.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

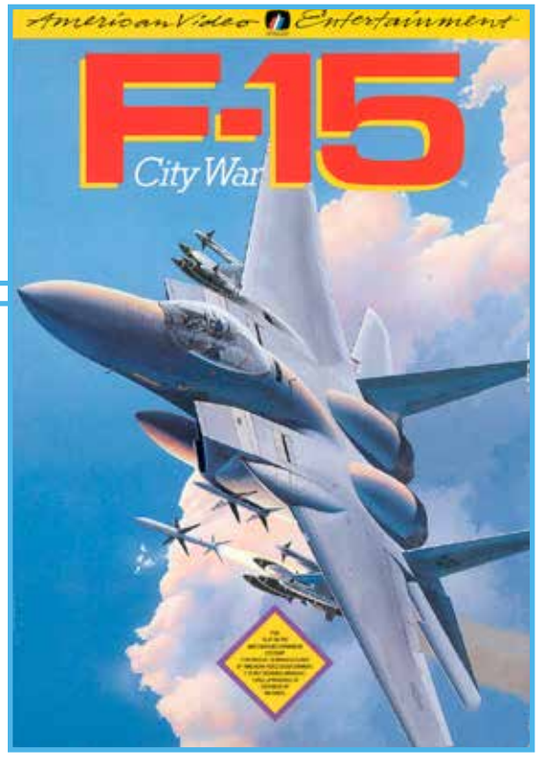






F-15 City War

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Idea-Tek
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



STRAP YOURSELF IN AND PREPARE FOR BATTLE!

Your city is under siege. Protect it or die. Jets. Tanks. Gun Boats. Giant Robots. Choppers. They're all out to destroy you. But you've got the power and speed of an F-15 behind you and all the ammo you need to decimate the enemy. The action's explosive! ▸ Five stages of killer combat. ▸ Five fierce F-15s to ferret out evil. ▸ Unlimited fire power—machine gun bullets, missiles and jet fuel. ▸ High-scoring action—rack up the points as you wipe out hostile forces. ▸ Attack from all sides—strike from above or confront the enemy head on. ▸ This isn't child's play. You and your city's survival is at stake. It's no longer just an issue of patriotism. It's life or death. Don't hold back. If you've got the guts . . . prove it!

F-15 City War alternates between two perspectives: behind the titular plane, which doesn't actually look like an F-15, and above it, where the action slows to a crawl. The play is arcade style in nature (despite levels lasting a fairly long time), with armchair pilots using an unlimited supply of machine gun bullets and missiles to blow away jets, tanks, gun boats, choppers, and giant robots. As the action begins, you fly your plane over a city street, with repetitious buildings choppily scrolling by. These are 3D areas that look like a cross between *Buck Rogers* and *Turbo* for the ColecoVision. Then it's time for some traditional top-down action. Other than 1-ups there are no power-ups, and all five stages of the game are decidedly dull. Bosses vary in appearance (such as a giant tank and a giant battleship), but are defeated by mindless button mashing. This unlicensed, hard-to-find game is playable, but that's about it.

Notable Quotable:

"This game's pathetic. In fact, about the only thing good I can say about it is that it's short enough that I managed to beat it before being bored to sleep. And it's not like it's one of those atrocious games everyone makes fun of. It's just . . .boring to the extreme. It's not even interesting enough to look at out of morbid curiosity." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*F-15 City War* is a shameless, terrible excuse for a shooter . . . The initial behind-the-plane viewpoint scrolls by with such a sub-standard framerate that any sense of speed is gone. You can literally see the buildings refresh from one frame to the next . . . Hit detection is also lax in this mode of play, making it impossible to hit everything thrown at you no matter how good you are . . . Every single stage of this game goes on for far too long, challenging not only the player's gaming skill, but their stamina as well. Long stretches occur where there is absolutely nothing on the screen other than the same cheap-looking ocean and the fighter jet itself. Helicopters, which attack in droves, never actually shoot at the player, but simply employ a cheap weaving pattern that any four-year-old could avoid." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

F-15 Strike Eagle

PUBLISHER: MicroProse Software
DEVELOPER: MicroProse Software
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992

F-15
STRIKE EAGLE
THE WORLD'S MOST REALISTIC FLIGHT SIMULATOR FOR NES™
Licensed by Nintendo® for play on the
Nintendo
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
This Game Pak cannot be used with the Master or NES versions of the Nintendo Entertainment System™
MICRO PROSE
Original Nintendo Seal of Quality
B

F-15
STRIKE EAGLE
THE WORLD'S MOST REALISTIC FLIGHT SIMULATOR FOR THE NES™
Strap yourself into the cockpit of America's hottest jet, the F-15 Strike Eagle! With awesome maneuverability and firepower, the F-15 can take on any challenge, anywhere, against anyone.
F-15 Strike Eagle is your chance to pilot the powerful jet on dangerous missions in the Persian Gulf. Try to destroy chemical warfare plants and lead an assult against the enemy. Lots of thrilling 3-D graphic adventures make the game constantly challenging, always new.
Recommended for Ages 8 to Adult
MICRO PROSE

F-15 Strike Eagle straps players into the cockpit of a jet fighter capable of loops, rolls, and high-speed turns. There are seven levels to conquer, including missions in Libya, Basra, Kuwait, and Baghdad. Gameplay consists of such actions as shooting missiles and bullets at enemy fighters; dodging enemy fire; monitoring altitude, speed, and radar; and destroying bridges, airfields, oil rigs, command centers, and chemical weapons plants. The top half of the screen shows the playfield, while the bottom half displays gauges, maps, and the like. You can pull loops, rolls, and high-speed turns. Compared to the original computer game (1985) the NES rendition has more colors and better graphics (enemies in the original are wire frame constructs), but the computer version has better, more responsive controls (thanks in part to keyboard input). You can fly solo or team up in a single plane with another gamer—one as the pilot and the other as the weapons officer. Includes digitized voice effects.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"This game is simply too ambitious for the 8-bit Nintendo." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:

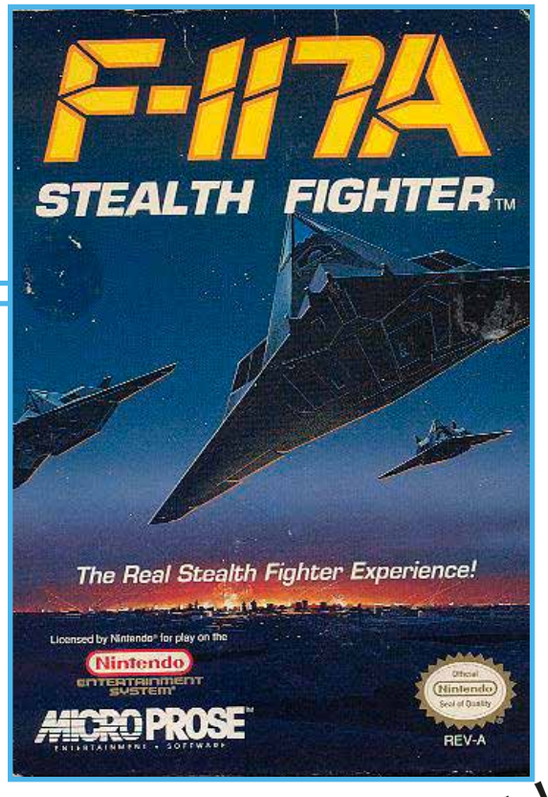
"With the straightforward gameplay, clean, clear graphics, excellent sampled speech, and varying difficulty levels this is a quite superb game." —*N-Force* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics won't knock you out, but they get you through your missions . . . As you gain combat experience you move up through four skill levels. At the top levels—Combat and Ace—you receive better weapons and gain more control over your aircraft—but you have to shoot straighter and fly better, too . . .basic video jet combat fare that offers quality flight time for any NES jet jockey." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

F-117A Stealth Fighter

PUBLISHER: MicroProse Software
DEVELOPER: MicroProse Software
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



F-117A Stealth Fighter comes to the little 8-bit console that could. A port of the game *Night Hawk: F-117A Stealth Fighter* (which was a sequel to *F-19 Stealth Fighter*), the game sends players on six air-to-air and air-to-ground missions—Libya, Middle East, Gulf War, Cuba, Korea, and North Cape—plus some highly classified missions. The top half of the playfield is the view screen, while the bottom half is a busy instrument panel depicting a text message screen, a compass, a fuel gauge, a speed indicator, a digital altitude display, a stealthometer, missile warnings, and various other things for the player to keep track of.

Clearly this is a complex challenge, with players locking onto targets, firing a 20 mm Vulcan cannon, launching missiles, releasing decoys, engaging an autopilot, bailing out of the plane, landing back at base, and much more. Gamers can play co-op or competitively.

Notable Quotable:

"The game just doesn't have enough punch. The emphasis on flight simulation is restrained by the limits of the NES to reproduce such effects, and the targeting battle sequences aren't able to muster up the necessary excitement . . .attempts too much and ends up delivering too little . . .no excitement in flying the plane . . .attack sequences left me flat, probably due to the lack of background graphic detail . . . The fun just isn't in there." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1993)

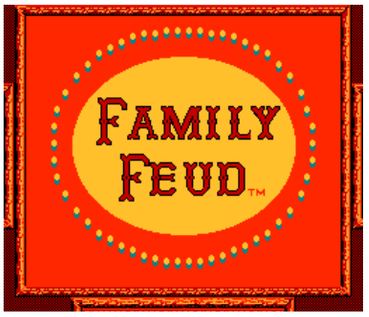
Notable Quotable:

"The majority of people on the planet will never be able to ride in a lightning-fast, high-powered military jet, hence why semi-realistic flight simulations like *F-117A Stealth Fighter* are made. In theory, games like this should accurately recreate the sense of speed and exhilaration one would feel in said craft, along with adding top secret government missions that involve blowing things up in foreign countries. Well, in *F-117A* you do have top secret missions and you supposedly fly a stealth fighter, but I'll be darned if it doesn't feel like you're riding in the Wright Brothers plane. Your craft, and the game as a whole, is slow and almost unplayable." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Family Feud

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Family Feud, the popular game show where contestants are asked survey questions, is playable on your NES cons[illegible] pair of five-member families, with th[illegible] of winning $20,000, compete to answer things like "Name a brand of camera," "Name a way that you can tell food has gone bad," and "Name something people wash a sponge with." Players must buzz in to try and guess the most popular answers (derived from a survey of 100 people). Inputting answers requires guiding a cursor over a letter or number grid within a 45-second time limit. If three incorrect answers are guessed the opposing team gets a chance to steal that family's money. As in the classic television program there are Fast Money Rounds, where two family members try to answer five questions in two minutes, and a lady-kissing host. Said host is unnamed, but he was surely inspired by noted lady-kisser Richard Dawkins, who hosted the TV show from 1976 to 1985 and from 1994 to 1995. Ray Combs was host when this game was released, but it's certainly not him.

OSCHEER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

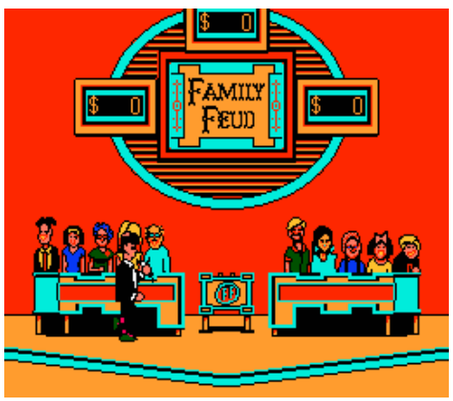
"Synonyms are a bit sketchy. For example, the game will accept 'looks' as valid for 'appearance' but gives you a strike for saying 'clothing' instead of 'clothes.' Most of the time it's good enough not to cause problems, but there are the occasional times where you wish you could appeal to the judges . . . It pales a bit in comparison to other game show games like *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*, but is still a faithful execution of its source material . . .good for a few quick rounds." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Family Feud* is a well-executed version of the popular game show, following its inspiration closely in terms of looks and gameplay. Each family is nicely detailed and animated, and the host adds a lot of style and atmosphere with his stereotypical swagger and cheesy smiles. Entering answers in console-based game shows can often be difficult, but the onscreen keyboard is easy to control and well laid out. The only problem is that incorrect answers given by the CPU are not revealed, making it impossible to rule them out when it's your turn to steal." —Brad Penniment (formerly at allgame.com)

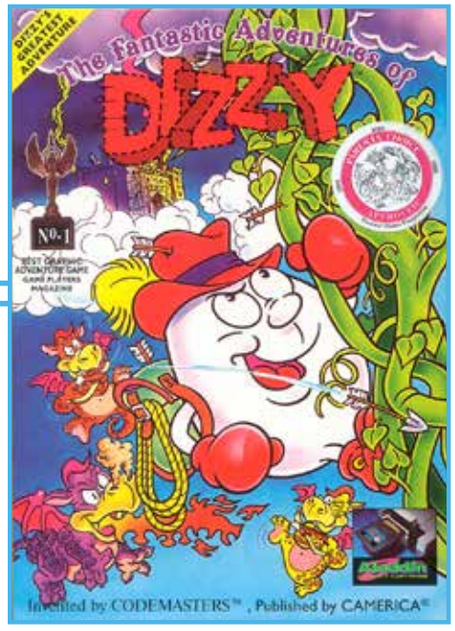
Notable Quotable:

"The characters are charming, and the host definitely favors Richard Dawson, as he kisses all the women. But the pace of the game is way too slow. While the character reactions are a nice touch the first time you see them, after playing through a full game you will wish there was a way to skip them. This is not unique to *Family Feud*; most of the GameTek gameshow ports on the NES are full of charm but move too slow . . . What makes *Family Feud* fun is guessing the answers. But a combination of a game close to 30 years old and the limited hardware of the NES makes many of the clues impossible to guess." —Hoz's 8-Bit NES Quest (hoz14nes.wordpress.com)



The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure Puzzle, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Dizzy, whom the player controls, is an egg-shaped adventurer who must rescue his girlfriend Daisy from the evil wizard Zaks, who has taken the damsel in distress to his castle in the clouds. Retrieving her requires finding 100 magic stars scattered throughout the game's cartoon-like lands, which are filled with leprechauns, trolls, magicians, and other strange creatures. Areas to explore include villages, forests, diamond mines, a dragon's lair, a pirate ship, and more. During his quest Dizzy will run, jump, swim, ride a mine cart, talk to characters, use a rope to swing across chasms, participate in mini-games, and pick up and use objects to solve puzzles, such as keys to unlock doors and a plank of wood to build a bridge over a spiky pit. The Aladdin compact cartridge rendition of *The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy*, which requires the Aladdin Deck Enhancer and was released in 1993, is almost identical to the standard version but for the following differences: 250 stars to find (up from 100); a simplified inventory system; certain items in different places; and some minor terrain alterations and level modifications. Also, Dizzy walks faster, and the word "Dizzy" on the title screen has been changed from blue to red. Unlicensed and fairly hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

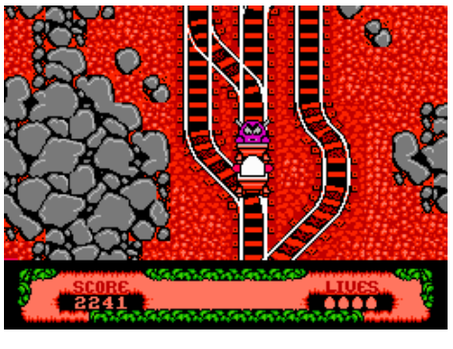
"*The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy* is so big, with so many different game styles, that you never get bored. I've found something new every time I pick up the joypad!" —*N-Force* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Humpty Dumpty would be proud. *Dizzy*'s a surprisingly eggs-citing game. The graphics, sound, and gameplay are above average, and the bonus areas are challenging." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Another try at a cute game with a distinguishable character and an action/quest theme that falls short in many areas. Dizzy's ability to carry only three items takes away from the excitement of the game. At best it's just an average game and not easy to get into." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1990)



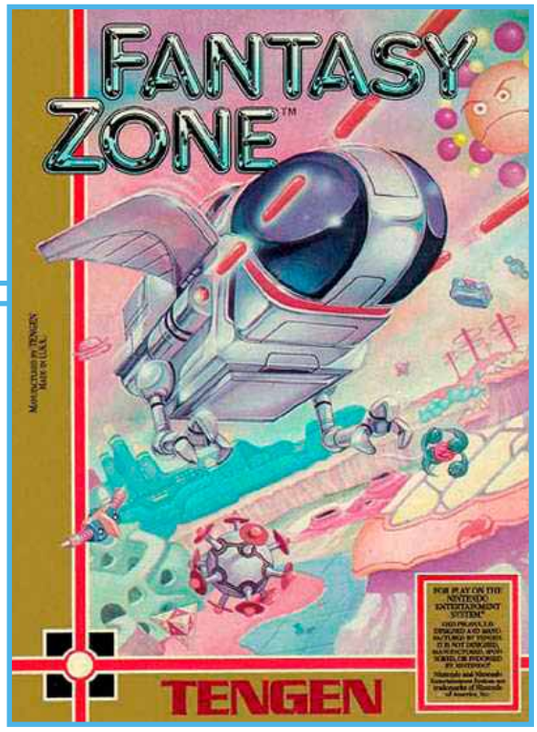
Insider Insight: Unless you are from the UK, it's unlikely that you will ever understand what a big deal Dizzy was to gamers here. The egg-shaped fellow first appeared on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC computers in 1987, as part of Codemasters' hugely popular budget range. Priced at a pocket money-friendly £2.99, it was judged to be better than most games costing more than three times that. Numerous sequels and spin-offs followed before Codemasters decided to start making NES games, part of their move to capture the highly lucrative North American market. Naturally, a new *Dizzy* was chosen as one of their first titles.

This move caused a tinge of sadness from us home computer owners, not just because we felt that Codemasters might be abandoning us, but also because we knew Americans just wouldn't understand what Dizzy represented to us, especially given the price of NES cartridges when compared to those cut price cassettes. We probably shouldn't have been so upset, because when I finally, and rather reluctantly, got round to playing *Fantastic Dizzy* (as it's also known) on the NES, I discovered that it was actually very good and a worthy follow up to all those *Dizzy* games I knew and loved on my humble ZX Spectrum. I supposed we should also be thankful that the success of this game, and indeed the company's move into making console games in general, is why Codemasters remains such a huge name in video game business and one of England's true success stories in this highly competitive sector. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Fantasy Zone

PUBLISHER: Tengen
DEVELOPER: Pixel
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



As in the coin-op classic *Defender*, *Fantasy Zone* has you flying a ship left and right around a wraparound world, firing away at airborne enemies. Unlike the starkly lit *Defender*, *Fantasy Zone* takes place on eight pastel-colored planets, each filled with cute characters and charming music. In addition to firing at an assortment of quirky creatures, you can collect coins for use in purchasing speed power-ups, laser beams, wide beams, twin bombs, smart bombs, fire bombs, and heavy bombs. Unlike the original arcade game (Sega, 1985) and the Master System version, the NES rendition does not feature 7-way shots (though it does compensate somewhat with 5-way shots). In the NES game's favor, the screen scrolls up and down a little, and there's a radar showing how many bases are left to destroy in the current world to proceed to the next. Both of these features are missing from the Master System version (though between the two the Master System game remains the superior port). Unlicensed and fairly hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"Consider me underwhelmed with this particular port . . . While the Nintendo version retains the basic elements of the original *Fantasy Zone*, I'm surprised at how few enemies there are to shoot, at how bland the colors look, at how slow and pathetic your ship is without weapon and equipment upgrades, and (finally) at the unbalanced difficulty. Stages are too easy, while bosses can be quite difficult." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

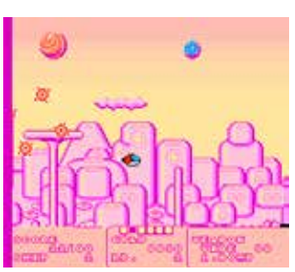
Notable Quotable:

"There are two *Fantasy Zone* adaptations for the Nintendo 8-bit systems. The Japanese Famicom version, ported by Sunsoft, is comparative to the Master System version, and still succeeds in looking decent despite being limited to 16 colors; plus it even manages to keep the radar. A few years later Tengen released their own version for the Nintendo Entertainment System. This version has completely different graphics to the Famicom game and not only looks substantially worse, but has funky controls and lots of flickering." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Memories: I was always intimidated by *Defender*, and I wasn't very good at it, but I loved the gameplay, so I was glad when a similar, but pleasant and less formidable game like *Fantasy Zone* came along.

Insider Insight: When I first started collecting and really getting into retro gaming as a hobby, one of the biggest revelations to me was that some Sega games had actually appeared on the NES via Tengen. For those that don't know, Tengen was the home label of arcade game manufacturers Atari Games, who were forbidden to use the Fuji or Atari name to publish home video games as part of an agreement made in the 1984 split. On the flip side, Atari Corporation wasn't allowed to make coin-ops. "Tengen" was a term from the board game Go (as "Atari" was), so the name made perfect sense. This licensing deal was particularly interesting because it connected the "Big 3" console manufactures of the time: Nintendo, Sega, and Atari.

Most of the games that came out of this agreement were poor conversions (*After Burner*, *Shinobi*, *Altered Beast*, and *Space Harrier*—I'm looking at you!), and part of me thinks that this was somehow intentional. But then you have to ask yourself, would Tengen want to release bad games? But when you consider how many bad games sold on name alone (as LJN proved!) the theory bounces back at you. Anyway, *Fantasy Zone* is the exception here, because it's actually a decent conversion of the classic cute-'em-up. It's cute and colorful, with great music and compulsive gameplay. Is it as good as Sega's own Master System port? No, but it's far from an awful alternative. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Faria: A World of Mystery & Danger!

PUBLISHER: Nexoft
DEVELOPER: Game Arts
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

Faria: A World of Mystery & Danger! has players, as an unnamed protagonist simply known as "soldier," engaging in real-time battles and exploring caves, grove[illegible]ns, puzzle-filled dungeons, and maze-like towers with the time-worn objective being to rescue the proverbial princess from an evil wizard. To battle the various monsters that inhabit the land, adventurers can use nine different swords, plus five types of bows: wood, bamboo, iron, steel, and cross. Other helpful items include armor, shields, wings (for traveling to previous townships), a flashlight, bombs, magic glasses, magic rope, and more.

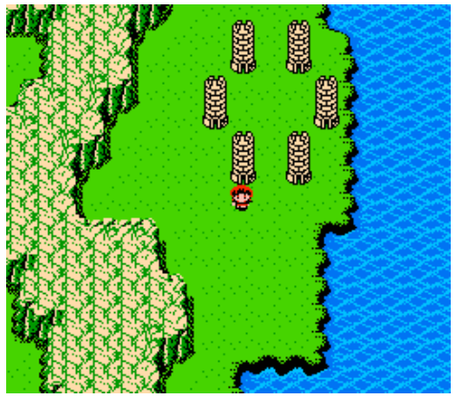
Our hero encounters random battles via an overhead map. As play progresses, gamers can increase their hit points, striking power, defensive power, and fighting experience. The challenge and relative complexity of *Faria*, which bears more than a passing resemblance to *The Legend of Zelda*, will please most fans of the genre.

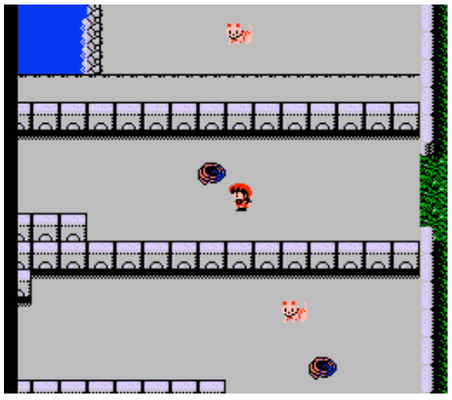
Notable Quotable:

"An entertaining role-playing game. It offers a solid assortment of weapons and armor and presents a good-sized world to explore. Adults and older teens will whip through it in a few days. It provides a better challenge for the younger set." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*Faria* can be a real slog. It's tedious at the best of times, while downright unfair at others . . . If you're choosing to play without the aid of a walkthrough, graphing paper is essential. But even graph paper won't help you with the false walls. Occasionally you'll find your progress barred by a hidden passage that needs to be uncovered. There's no differentiation in graphics to give it away, requiring you to methodically strike every wall in every dead end room you come to . . . The soundtrack consists entirely of tinny looping pieces . . .it's bright, colorful, and adorable. The townspeople are amusing caricatures, with a close-up during conversation. Many of the monster designs are a bit plain, but occasionally the cuteness shines through here, too." —Robert Fenner (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

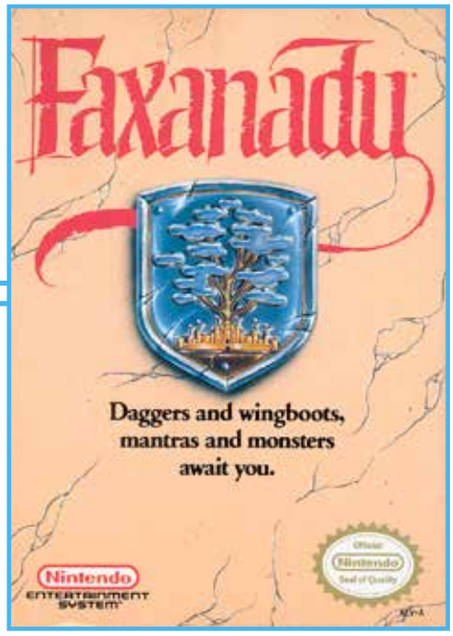




OSCHIFER PUBLISHING

Faxanadu

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



The elf town of Elois is under attack by meteorites and monsters, and it is up to the player, as The Hero, to journey through caves, towns, fields, and dungeons, battling monsters to gain experience, and ultimately confronting the Evil One in his fortress. Each area has its own atmosphere and musical score. Visiting shops (including a hospital, a bank, and a hardware store), the Hero can purchase a hand dagger, a long sword, a giant blade, a dragon slayer, and four types of armor: studded mail, full suit of armor, and battle suit (he begins outfitted with a leather jerkin). He can also buy hints, keys, and four types of shields. Other useful items include a ruby ring (for moving rocks), wing boots (for flying), a pendant (for increasing your sword attacking power), and a mattock (for destroying walls), among others. The Hero is also a magic user, commanding five types: deluge, fire, thunder, death, and tilt. By entering gyms the Hero can learn to use magic and weapons. Rather than a top-down perspective the game employs a side view, with the protagonist jumping on platforms and over gaps, climbing ladders, and swinging his sword at such enemies as dwarves, gnomes, giant snakes, zombies, skeletal hounds, and flying phantoms.

Notable Quotable:

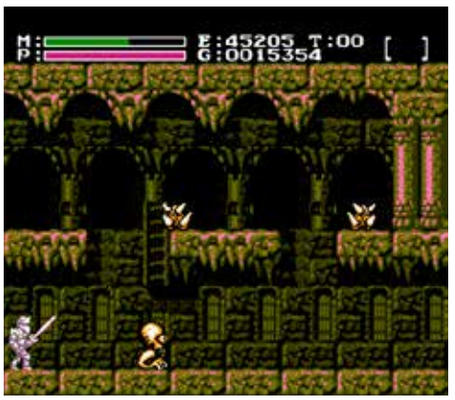
"Although *Faxanadu* is a good game, it falls short of the standard set by *Ultima*, *Dragon Warrior*, *Shadowgate*, the *Zelda* adventures, and many other role-playing games now being released for Nintendo. Very little in *Faxanadu* will seem original or unique to experienced gamers, and the game is hurt by its cluttered graphics." —*Game Players* (December 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics in the game were high quality . . .has many nice backgrounds and the strangest enemies . . . The bosses early on are a little boring, but the ones at the end of the game are large, imaginative, and just plain cool . . . The music from *Faxanadu* still follows me to this day . . . The story is quite old and overused, and the spoken sections of the game contain a few typos . . . There are no plot twists or surprises, and even the ending is pretty standard . . . Your character jumps much like the princess in *Super Mario Bros. 2*, going up and hovering for a moment before falling. The countless enemies that fly around ruin many of your jumps, and other leaps require a well-timed slash to clear the path. It's not that I don't like the challenge, but I wish I could control this guy a little better." —RPGFan (www.rpgfan.com)

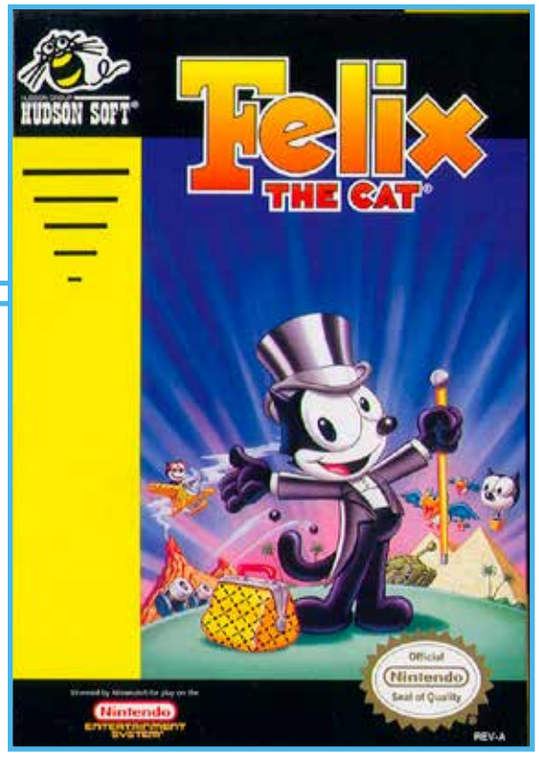
Insider Insight: Early in 1991 I finally got to play *Faxanadu*, which I had previously seen in the pages of *Nintendo Power*. I borrowed it from my friend Chris after seeing him play a little bit of the game, and what struck me about it was how your character changed the way he looked when you got new weapons and armor. I had never seen that in a game before and thought, "Wow, I really need to play this." It just so happened that the weekend I borrowed the game I was spending the night at my friend Mike's place, so I brought it over, along with my recently purchased copy of the Megadeth album, *Rust in Peace*. We spent the next two days listening to the classic metal album, wondering what our next upgrades were going to look like, and stabbing baddies in the face until we finally beat the game. The only downside to listening to that album while playing the game was that we initially missed out on its fantastic soundtrack. It's a great memory for me, and the two will forever be linked inside my head. I can't "Rust in Peace" if I don't "Remember my Mantra." How could I "Remember my Mantra" if I don't "Rust in Peace"? —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Felix the Cat

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



A highly agreeable platformer, *Felix the Cat* puts the famous furry cartoon feline on a quest to rescue his girlfriend fr[illegible] evil Professor. As such he must run, ju[illegible]im, drive, and fly his way through nine areas of play (including a prehistoric world, the North Pole, and the Moon), using his vaunted magic bag of tricks to thwart dinosaurs, bats, fish, Rock Bottom, Poindexter, Master Cylinder, and other enemies and obstacles. Felix begins on land with one magic item—a short-range boxing glove for punching baddies—and can gain other magic items (which last a limited time) by collecting Felix heads. When you collect 10 a heart from Kitty will appear, and if you catch it, you'll get the magic item. Magic lets Felix float in a air balloon (where he can throw frisbees), fly a plane, ride a dolphin or a turtle, and pilot a tank, spaceship, and submarine. The vehicles and animals you commandeer can shoot and fly or jump. Like the *Kirby* and *Mario* platformers, *Felix the Cat* offers cute, cartoon-like graphics, nice animation, smooth controls, and a rollicking good time. Best of all, the game stays true to the spirit of Felix, which New Jersey cartoonist Otto Messmer created in the early 1900s.

Memories: As a kid I was a huge fan of the *Felix the Cat* cartoons. I was fascinated by his magic bag of tricks and would daydream about having something like that of my own. My older brother Scott would giggle about the name of the Professor's canine sidekick, Rock Bottom. When I stumbled across the game for $15 a few years ago at a convention, I bought it because I had heard it was a nice, relaxing game with cute graphics. I had heard right—it's a great game to play when you just want to have fun with something that's not too intense or violent. Recently I saw the game—cartridge only—at a local store called Found It Electronics selling for $90. I'm not even remotely tempted to sell my copy.

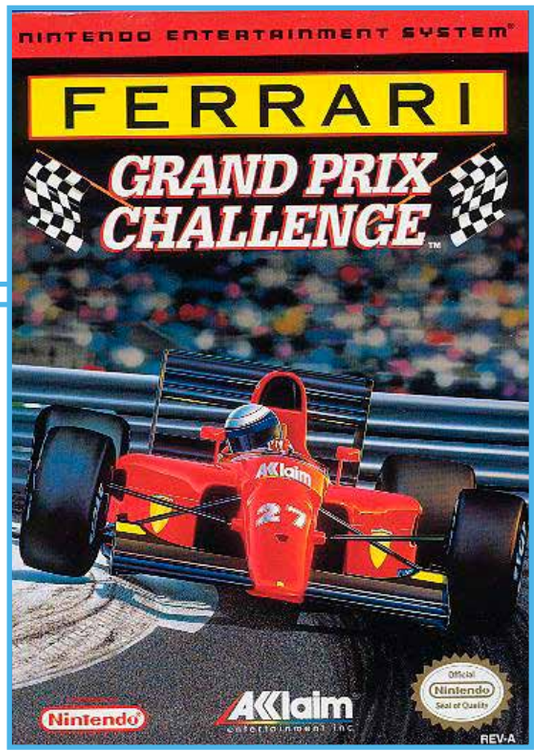
Notable Quotable:
"This just may well be one of the last 8-bit games really worth playing." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Superb . . .makes you master a variety of skills . . .never gets boring . . .some of the coolest graphics you've ever seen on an 8-bit system. Big characters and a cartoony style create the illusion that this is a playable cartoon. Detailed animation and special touches, like bubbles underwater, trees with eyes that follow you in the forest, and Poindexter's spinning basketball all lend to Felix's all-you-can-eat visual buffet . . .fun to play . . .will keep folks with even the shortest attention spans engaged." —*GamePro* (October 1992)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ferrari Grand Prix Challenge

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: System 3 Software
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



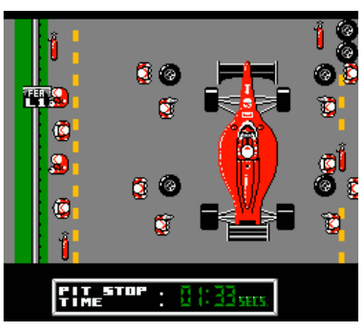
Viewed from behind the player's car, *Ferrari Grand Prix Challenge* has gamers racing against 24 cars and 8 teams on twisting, turning tracks. The playfield takes the top two-thirds of the screen, while the bottom one-third shows the dashboard displaying speed, gear (players can select from automatic or three-speed transmission), revs, lap number, lap time, position, radio (which gives such warnings as oil on the track), rear-view mirror, and course map. Signs along the way keep players advised of forthcoming turns and overhead view pit stops, in which players furiously push buttons to make the pit crew change tires as fast as possible. Background graphics include mountains and buildings, but roadside scenery is sparse, depicting redundant gray and green striped grass. The controls are more forgiving than in most F1 games and the music is genuinely enjoyable.

Notable Quotable:

"A decent formula one racing title . . . While your car's in decent shape, the courses it drives are less appealing. The scenery and sounds are just average and less stimulating than the tracks found in carts like *Rad Racer*. *Ferrari*'s strength is a lengthy, challenging contest." —*GamePro* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"It's not unique or overly showy . . . The tracks get increasingly more windy and difficult. Thankfully the controls are fairly tight. If your car's in good shape and you can get the hang of each track's layout you'll be in like Flynt—or possibly Steve McQueen in various films where he drives a car really fast. *Ferrari Grand Prix Challenge* doesn't boast miracles, but it does deliver solid 8-bit formula racing." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

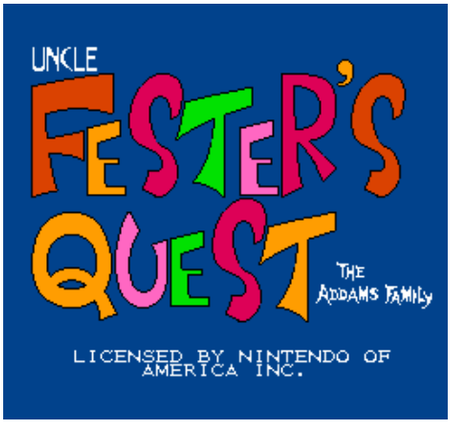
Fester's Quest

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
GAME TYPE: Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

In this largely humorless *Addams Family* spin-off, bald but bold Uncle Fester travels streets and sewers, rescuing town from aliens and battling bosses to gain clues. During his quest he will enter seven houses (each containing an Addams family member) and six labyrinthine buildings. To ward off globules, hovering aliens, slime replicators, giant scorpions, and other enemies that appeared during a recent alien invasion Fester can brandish a gun, a whip, TNT, and missiles. Other usable items include bulbs (for seeing underground), keys (for entering buildings), money (for buying hotdogs), and a noose, the last of which makes Lurch appear and kill all onscreen enemies. Two viewpoints are featured: overhead and first-person maze. There's lots of shooting, so the manual recommends playing the game with a turbo/rapid-fire joystick.

Notable Quotable:
"There's not a lot of action . . . You basically run around, trying to find certain items and only stopping to fight a couple of boss characters along the way. It's a slow game that doesn't have much action or adventure and is unbalanced with boss creatures that are too fast for the slow pace." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

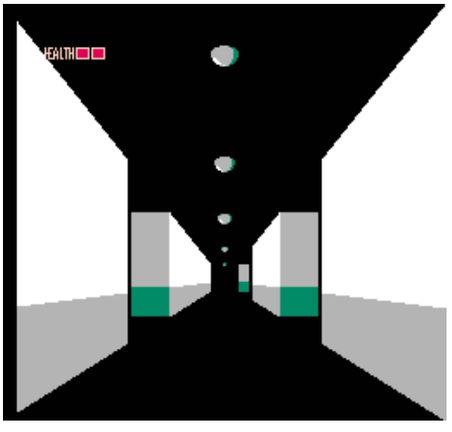
Notable Quotable:
"While the premise is cute, and the gameplay fine for the premise, we found disturbing blinking that broke up the Fester character as he moved about town. It didn't appear that there were enough moving sprites on the screen to justify the amount of blinking and problem graphics. Certainly the music is cute and the *Addams Family* a cult favorite with many; however, the gameplay is not unique enough and the graphics problem is bothersome enough to force us to recommend against the game." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1989)

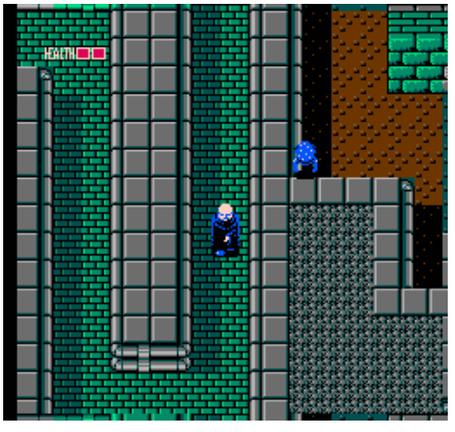


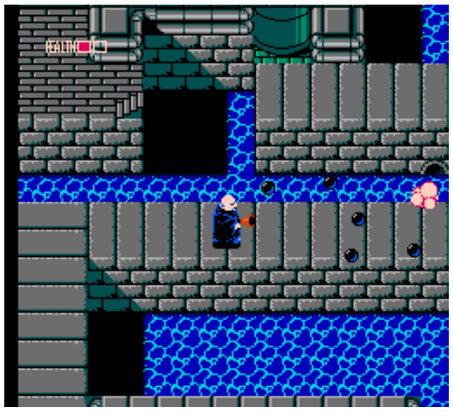
Notable Quotable:
"What a dull game . . .the unrewarding walkabout/shootout gameplay was something of a downer. You just go on and on, shooting blob-like monsters that reappear the moment their remains scroll off the screen, and the humorous potential of the Uncle Fester link is never actually used during the game . . .the graphics are flickery and unimpressive, so there's not even much compulsion to play on and see the next bit of the game." —*Computer and Video Games* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"*Fester's Quest* is a classic example of how not to design a game from a level design, combat, and gameplay perspective . . .a lazy, poorly developed title." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING







Insider Insight: I have a love-hate relationship with *Fester's Quest*. Growing up I was a big *Addams Family* fan, and I loved the movie, so when there were games coming out on the NES I was eager to try them. Seeing Uncle Fester's big, bald, blue head on the box art enticed me. *Nintendo Power* covering the game in-depth made me want to play it even more. Sunsoft makes a lot of quality NES games, but *Fester's Quest* is in a league of its own. The game is difficult, especially during the 3D dungeon crawler sections. In fact, the challenge is unfair at times, but it is the beauty of the game's flaws that makes it a cult classic for many NES fans. In fact, it is one of the most requested games for me to play on my retro livestreams on my YouTube channel. I guess my audience enjoys watching me be tortured for their entertainment. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

Insider Insight: When I was a kid, Christmas was the best time to get video games. Every year my mom would ask me for a list of games I wanted, and if I was lucky—and a good boy—I might get one or two of them. One year I wanted *Dragon Warrior* so bad I couldn't sleep without dreaming about it. I was a fan of RPGs, both on PC and tabletop, and the Americanized version of Enix Corp's *Dragon Quest* had been on my radar for months. I had tried renting it, but quickly realized that it was a game that couldn't be finished in a handful of nights, so it quickly became the number one game on my gift list that year.

Dragon Warrior had been out for a while and it was easy to find, making it simple for my mom. To be safe I added a few other games to the list, just for good measure, but *Dragon Warrior* was the prize. When Christmas day rolled around I saw the distinctively shaped package wrapped under the tree and I knew it was a video game. I was ready to embark on my great and epic journey, battling slimes, golems, and eventually the Dragonlord. Months of waiting and planning were finally about to pay off. When it came time to open gifts I saved that one for last, knowing full well that it was the gift of the year, and my heart was pounding in my chest to open it and spend the rest of my Christmas break from school grinding for levels and exploring the massive map.

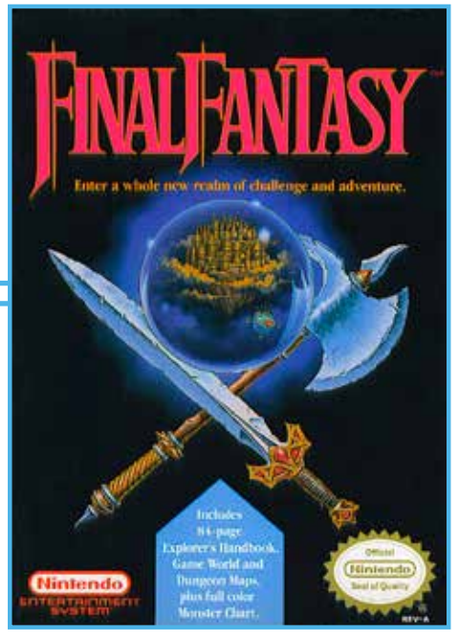
With a smile on my face I ripped into the wrapping paper, and when I saw the bald-headed face of Jackie Coogan staring back at me the world stopped. My brain could not comprehend what had happened. Instead of the artwork of a gallant knight fighting a dragon, the box in my hand had Uncle Fester of the Addams Family smiling at me. It was *Fester's Quest*, from Sunsoft, and not the highly coveted *Dragon Warrior*. I could not hide my disappointment. In fact, that Christmas would go down as the year I proved to be a horrible, ungrateful punk, as I could not believe what had happened—and I let my mother know it. I'm ashamed for that. Deeply ashamed.

After the wave of disappointment faded and the ripped and shredded wrapping paper had all been discarded I was left alone with my new game—the game I didn't want and only put on the list as filler. To be fair, I did play *Fester's Quest* all during my break, and I did finish it. I actually rather enjoyed it. I wouldn't get a chance to play *Dragon Warrior* until the following summer, and while I've now played and finished all of the *Dragon Quest* games and consider myself a huge fan of the series, looking back, I'm kind of glad that I got *Fester's Quest*, as I'm not sure I would have ever bought or played it otherwise, and it really was a fun game. Maybe my mom knew something I didn't. —Jon Hueber, who has been covering the video game industry for more than 20 years; find his work at www.electricbento.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Final Fantasy

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Square
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990


FINAL FANTASY
Enter a whole new realm of challenge and adventure.
Includes 84-page Explorer's Handbook, Game World and Dungeon Maps, plus full color Monster Chart.
Nintendo
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

Along with *Phantasy Star* (Master System, 1988) and *Dragon Warrior* (NES, 1989), *Final Fantasy* helped popularize console role-playing games in the United States and even introduced the genre to many people. In this game, players create a party of four adventurers (called Light Warriors) from six different character classes—fighter, black belt, thief, red mage, white mage, and black mage—each of whom can mature into an adult over time, and each of whom has different strengths and weaknesses. For example, unlike the fighter, whose specialty is wielding weapons and armor, the black mage excels at casting powerful magic spells. Gameplay consists of exploring a huge world (including towns, castles, forests, and caves), talking to characters to garner clues, setting sail on the ocean, opening treasure boxes, and much more. Random, turn-based battles frequently occur, with players selecting from a menu of such options as fight, run, magic, drink, and item. During battles the overhead perspective switches to side-view.

Notable Quotable:

"The oceans, deserts, forests, fields, rocky cave floors, lava puddles, towns, castles, and buildings maintain an image of a beautiful fantasy world . . . The sprites used for the heroes are smaller than the enemies, and are a little blocky and pixelated . . . When heroes are affected by any action, such as being attacked or having spells used on them, they flicker . . . The composition of the songs is very good, but the audio lacks the realism made possible by digital sound processing used in later consoles . . .longtime gamers may get a sense of nostalgia from the music . . . After completing the game once, it can be fun to go through again using a different team of heroes . . .a fine example of an old, 2D RPG . . .plenty of places to explore, items to find, and legends to learn." —RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)

Notable Quotable:

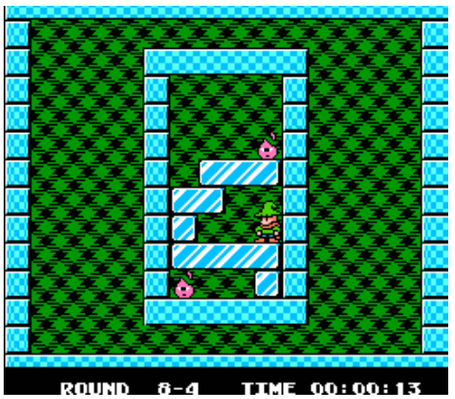
"A take on the genre that didn't simply mimic Enix's *Dragon Quest*, but instead attempted to reach back to the roots of role-playing, with many elements adapted from *Ultima*, *Wizardry*, and even *Dungeons & Dragons* . . .an ambitious plot . . .status as a first draft of sorts makes it hard to return to. The interface system alone drags down the experience . . .an extremely limited and simplistic take on an RPG. A fine game in its time? A classic that deserved to kick off a franchise? Definitely. But also terribly dated." —Jeremy Parish (www.polygon.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: The first time I ever saw my friend Chris play *Final Fantasy* I hated it. I thought that it was nothing but a cheap knockoff of *Ultima: Exodus*. I can't remember what led me to give the game another chance, but I'm so happy I did. After I watched Chris play the game a few times he was kind enough to let me borrow it, along with the maps, monster list, and the *Nintendo Power* guide companion issue. The first time I played the game my sister and brother-in-law were visiting, and he was overwhelmed by the game, just based on the guide book alone. After a month or so I finally finished the game. I was so proud I had my mom take a picture of me with the end screen, which I had intended on sending into *Nintendo Power*. Unfortunately, I never did. This my favorite NES game, hands down. I felt like I was a part of this world as I played it. It engaged me in a way that no other game had before. And what more can be said of the amazing score by Nobuo Uematsu? I love this game not only for what it is, but because it truly got me into RPGs. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

Fire 'n Ice

PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: Tecmo
GAME TYPE: Maze Puzzle/Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



The follow up to *Solomon's Key* (NES) and *Solomon's Club* (Game Boy), *Fire 'n Ice* is, like its progenitors, a deviously clever puzzler, but it changes the formula enough to keep things interesting. On a mission to protect Coolmint Island, the wizard Dana, who can no longer jump or shoot fireballs, must create, push, climb, and destroy ice blocks to extinguish flames in 15 worlds, each of which contains 10 rooms. Every tenth room of a world is a boss level, adding monsters, ghosts, and other enemies to the action. Enemies vary in abilities, such as those holding umbrellas cannot be destroyed by an ice block falling from above.

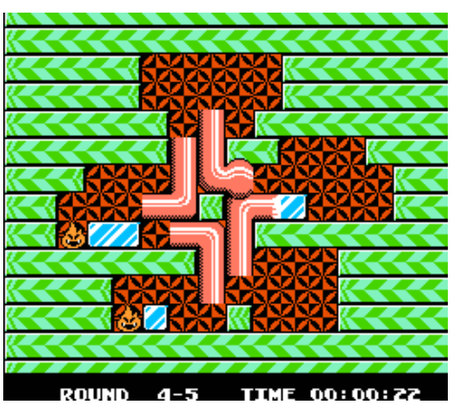
As in *Solomon's Club*, gamers can play through the worlds in virtually any order. In addition, a special Edit Mode lets gamers design and play their own rooms. The lack of battery back-up means players cannot save their creations, but a password feature does enable players to save their progress through the standard game.

Notable Quotable:

"At first it seems like a simple puzzle game for kids, but don't be deceived. The gameplay is very thought-provoking, and planning a set of 15 to 30 movies is common in the later levels. While not impressive graphically by today's standards, this cart has a great replay value and is fun all the way through." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1993)

Notable Quotable:

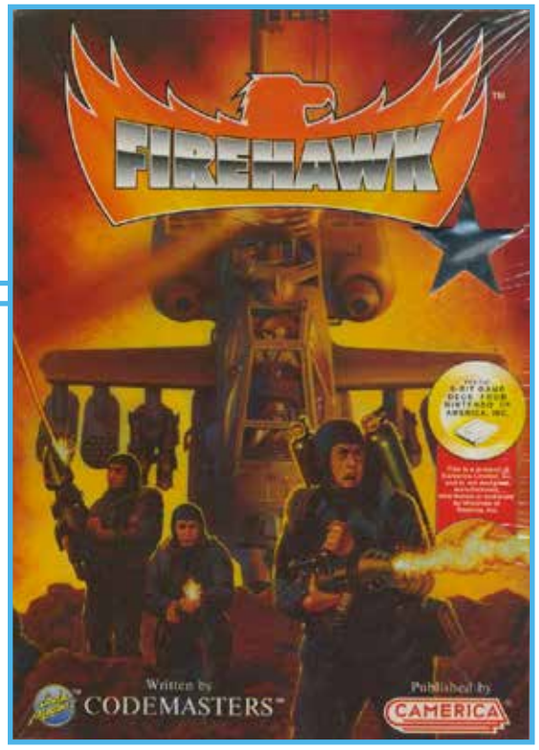
"Veterans of *Solomon's Key* may find the game particularly frustrating, as the lack of a jumping ability, absence of fireballs, and ability to create a block of ice only diagonally below Dana makes the gameplay feel a bit more limited. These limitations are quickly overcome as one plays the game . . . The game begins with a telling of the story, complete with a slideshow-style progression of pictures . . .very colorful and detailed overworld map on the level selection screen. The actual rooms however are very basic . . . The developers attempted to spice things up by changing the color scheme of the rooms based on the level in which they appear, but it is not enough to keep the levels from appearing uninspired . . .music is more varied [than *Solomon's Key*] . . .sound effects are standard fare for a puzzle game . . . Gameplay is where this title excels." —Chris Alaimo (www.digitpress.com)



SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Firehawk

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



The helicopter gunship you pilot in *Firehawk* moves fast and can shoot bullets, launch bombs, rotate, and fly in all directions. Throughout the game you can acquire extra shields, ammo, and fuel, and can power-up the helicopter with faster firing, faster maneuvering speed, bigger bullets, and triple firing. There are seven missions, each of which has you destroying military targets such as runways, tank hangars, and heli landing pads. You'll also rescue paratroopers, which are found by following a moving arrow. Once a paratrooper has been located the action switches to behind the helicopter, where heat-seeking sights will automatically track and lock onto enemy choppers moving across the screen. You must time your shots accordingly to destroy the enemy choppers and give the paratrooper time to climb up a rope ladder and safely into the helicopter. Unlicensed and hard to find.

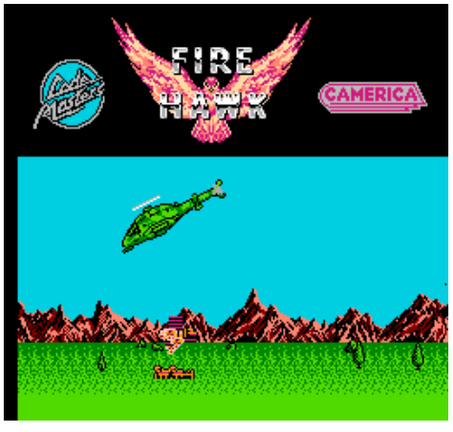
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

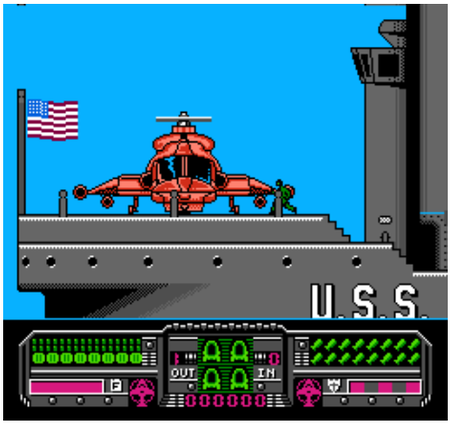
Notable Quotable:

"Codemasters was the best developer of unlicensed games for the NES . . .the steering controls will take some getting used to. The helicopter can be unwieldy at first, but controlling it does become easier over time. For those that like *Choplifter* and the *Strike* series, *Firehawk* comes highly recommended." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

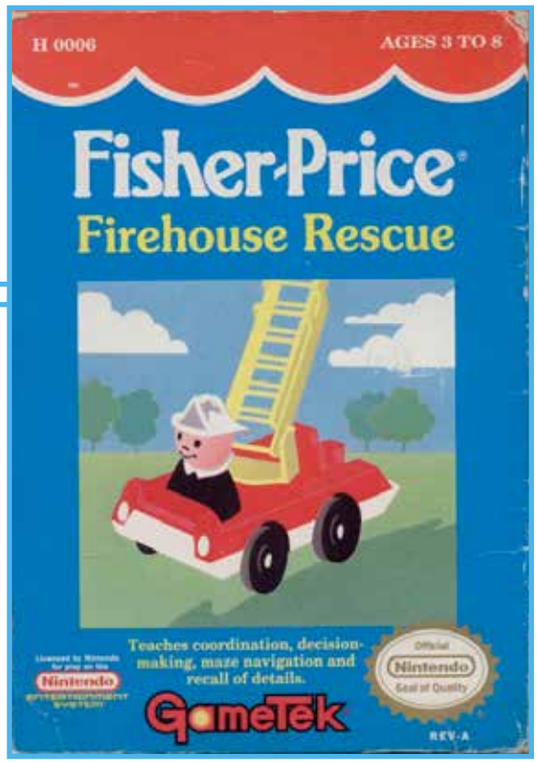
"The action is simple in concept, but the semi-realistic controls take some work to master . . . *Firehawk* is a much better game than I was expecting—the Codemasters pedigree serves it well, and the action is challenging from the get-go. Like most NES-era games, the action becomes repetitive after a while. But the player has a lot of freedom in determining how best to approach each situation, and as a result *Firehawk*'s gameplay still holds up well two decades after its original release." —Gaming After 40 (gamingafter40.blogspot.com)





Fisher-Price: Firehouse Rescue

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Maze/Action, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Featuring graphics patterned after the classic Fisher Price toy line, *Fisher-Price: Firehouse Rescue* includes two types of extremely basic gameplay. During the first part of each level the action is viewed from overhead, and players must drive a fire truck around a maze of streets to a house. Once the truck reaches the house a side-view is shown, with players rescuing (with a fire truck ladder) Fisher Price toy people trapped in the upper level of said house. There are no enemies or obstacles to speak of, and there's no actual representation of fire (this is a kids' game, after all), but harder difficulty levels do introduce side-scrolling mazes and keys to find before reaching houses. The tune "Barnum and Bailey's Favorite" plays during the title screen.

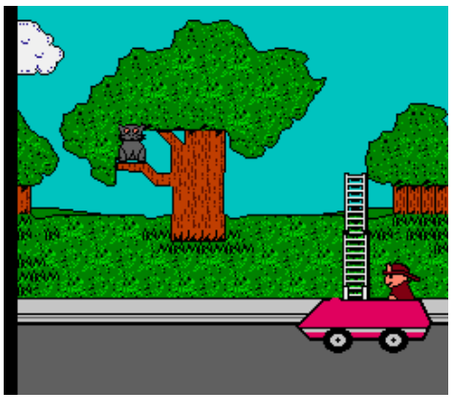
Memories: When the Fisher Price NES games were new in stores they were clearly not worth the $30 or so parents paid for them; however, as a collector now, if you can pick them up for $5 a piece or less for your collection go for it, as they are fairly hard to find. If you're a completist, that is.

Notable Quotable:

"There's nothing objectionable about the game's content, but the weak visuals and sound effects probably won't hold a child's attention." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

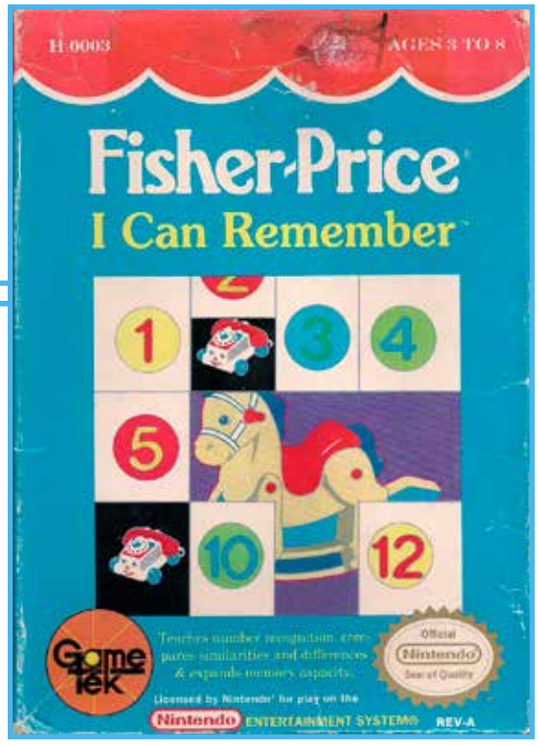
"I know this game is for children, as it has the prefix 'Fisher Price' attached to it, but it's *so easy*. A story: I first got *Super Mario Bros.* when I was four years old. I may have had no idea what I was doing—I used to jump when Mario jumped, and the first Goomba was my worst enemy for a while—but I loved it. Not knowing how to play the game gave me incentive to play more. Even at age four, I would have conquered all four of *Firehouse Rescue*'s difficulty levels in 30 minutes. I may not like kids that much, nor do I particularly want one at this current time in my life, but they're much smarter than this game gives them credit for." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Fisher-Price: I Can Remember

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

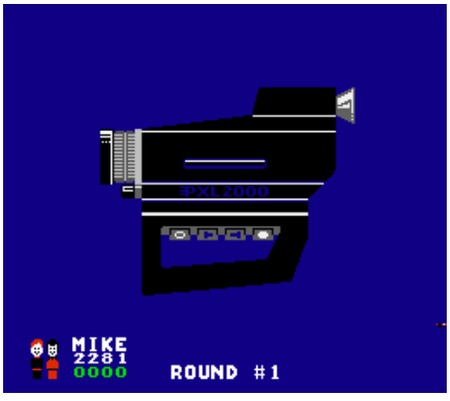


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Designed for children ages three to eight, *Fisher-Price: I Can Remember* is essentially an electronic version of *Concentration*, the classic memory game. From a playfield consisting of 12, 16, or 20 boxes (depending on skill level), players take turns flipping boxes two at a time, with the objective being to create matches. Each box contains a small toy, such as a roller skate or a drum, and completing the entire board reveals a large Fisher-Price toy or grouping of toys. The graphics are flat, blocky, static images, and such standards as "Old MacDonald" and "Mary Had a Little Lamb" play in loops. Similar to *Hunt & Score* for the Atari 2600, but the Atari game actually offers a 32-square board. Too simplistic and limited in nature, even for a kid's game.

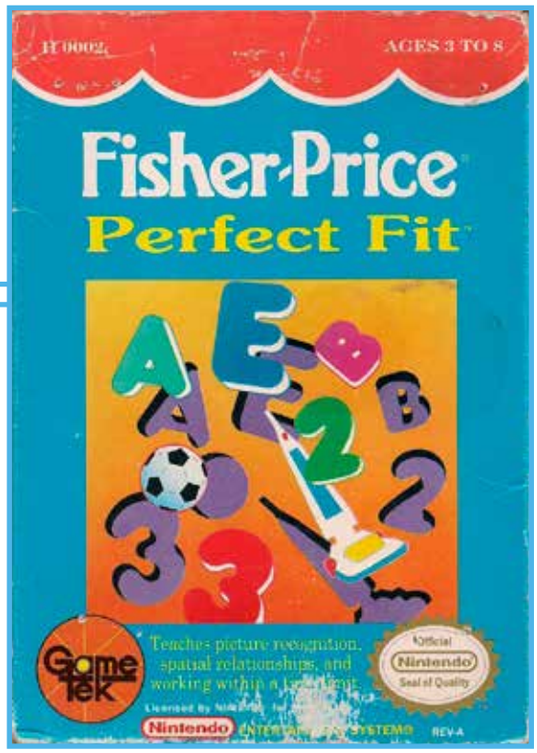
Notable Quotable:

"A terrific game for children . . .will provide a lot of fun for your growing child . . .the graphics and music don't add much to the game, but it doesn't matter . . .the game is not about graphics or music, just about childish fun . . . Your child will love to play through this game many times just because it's so fun to feel rewarded for doing something. Every time you clear a stage you'll see a different picture, and there are several different pictures, so the game definitely has an advantage over similar memory games that don't offer the same kind of reward." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)



Fisher-Price: Perfect Fit

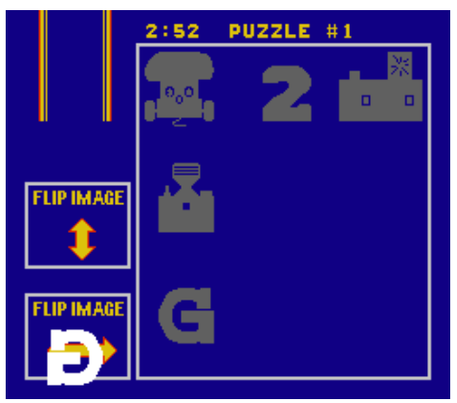
PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1990

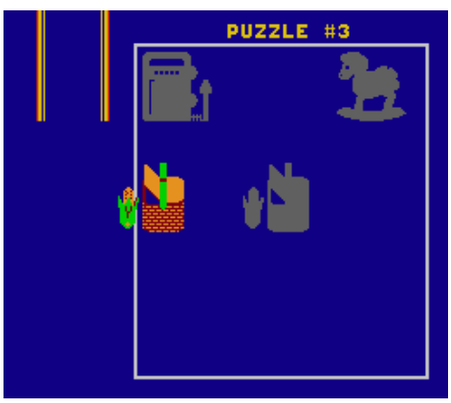


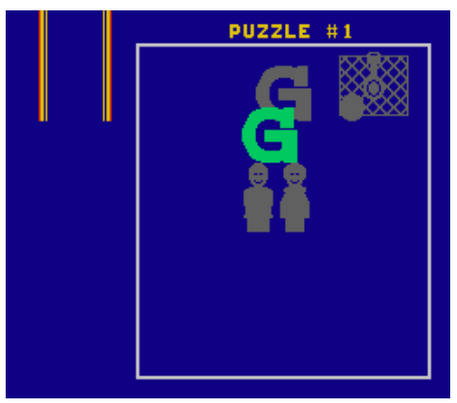
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

In *Perfect Fit*, Fisher-Price toys drop down, one at a time, out of a chute on the left side of the screen. Players must move each toy onto the playfield and over the matching shadow of that toy. If the object is not placed properly, or it is placed over the shadow of a different toy, a buzz will sound, letting gamers know of their error. In more challenging levels players must flip the images and work against a time limit. The game is designed to help children ages three to six develop object recognition and eye-hand coordination, but boredom can set in after repeated play. The action is complemented by such traditional favorites as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

Notable Quotable:
"While I can't fault a game designer for attempting to make games that teach little kids, would it hurt them to give children a modicum of credit? Could we please pretend that kids do in fact have brains that they use on a daily basis? If we follow the logic of *A Perfect Fit*, then education in America died quickly and painfully in the early '90s . . .the simplest game I've ever had the displeasure to play. If *Firehouse Rescue* was the action packed kick-off to this snoozefest of a product placement trilogy, and *I Can Remember* the awkward, brainier middle child, then *Perfect Fit* is the developers setting back the fight for education a good twenty years." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

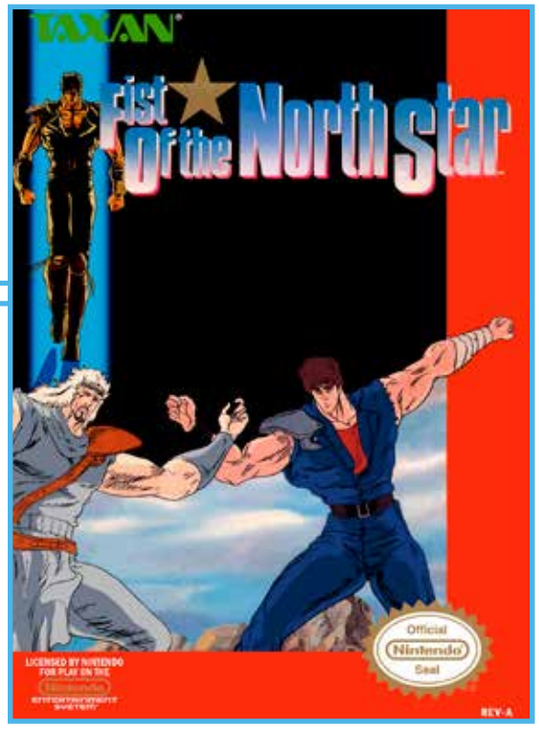






Fist of the North Star

PUBLISHER: Taxan
DEVELOPER: Shouei System
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Fist of the North Star
PUSH START VS START
HI SCORE 0000000
TM AND © BRONSON,HARA TETSUO /SHUEISHA,FUJI TV ,TOEI ANIMATION
1989 TOEI ANIMATION
SHOUEI SYSTEM
1989 TAXAN USA CORP.
LICENSED BY
NINTENDO OF AMERICA INC.

In *Fist of the North Star* a karate expert named Ken walks (stiffly and awkwardly), punches, kicks, crouches, and jumps (on brick platforms, over gaps, and up stairs) his way through eight boring levels of bad guys who execute a variety of attacks, including fireballs, sliding kicks, clenching claws, and white light bombs. When killed, enemies explode or fly off the screen. Defeating certain enemies increases Ken's strength or, in the case of besting 20 baddies, charges him up for a special shooting attack. Power-up items include flags for regaining energy, a silver necklace for restoring shooting power, and a gold necklace for using Gento Karate (transparency/invincibility). *Fist of the North Star* is based on the anime and manga series originally serialized in Japan (as *Hokuto no Ken*) in the weekly magazine *Shonen Jump*.

Notable Quotable:

"The NES game doesn't exactly exude machismo, but I wouldn't call it awful by any means . . . Enemies come at you much like the foes in *Kung Fu* which gives the game some note of familiarity . . . The controls are responsive . . .the music could be a little better. Though the tracks are catchy, they're essentially 10-second bars that run in continuous loops, so they get kind of old . . . Various aspects of the game are repetitive and/or monotonous." —Retro Cynical (YouTube)

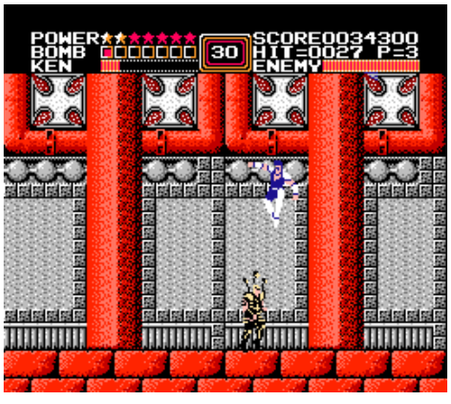
Notable Quotable:

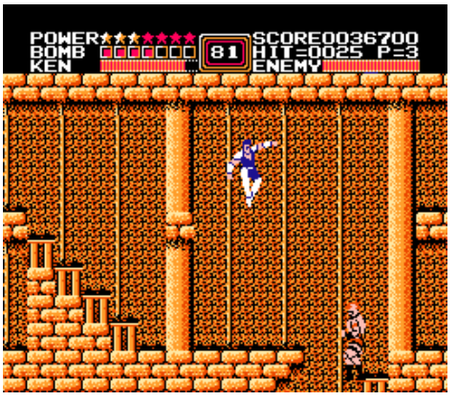
"I discovered *Fist of the North Star* at a far too young age. My family had bought a random issue of the *Viz* single-issue release, and the violence and casual nudity blew my mind. Fast forward nearly a decade and I watched the animated movie and it blew my mind once again. *Fist of the North Star* had all the ingredients to make an awesome action game: martial arts, violence, and an awesome story. How can you screw that up? Somehow the developers found a way. This is a sad bastardization of the awesome manga . . . For a game focused on melee action the hit detection is awful and completely ruins it." —Classic-Games.net (www.classic-games.net)

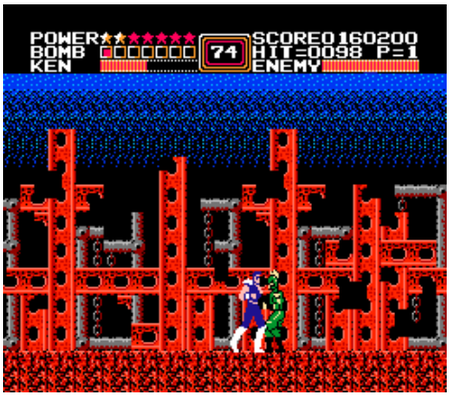
Notable Quotable:

"One of those awesome ninja side scrollers with enemies flying off the screen and bosses bursting into chunks . . . You can really jump high . . .you can actually jump faster than you can run . . . The dull, military-style scenery features a lot of forts, caves, and ruins . . . A FAQ told me how to enter doorways. Apparently you have to press A+B+right at the same time . . . I can't believe the instructions failed to mention this. Moving between vertical areas is a thoroughly disorienting experience. Despite its glaring flaws, *Fist of the North Star* packs a wallop . . .action is non-stop . . .memorable 8-bit music . . .its cheesiness only adds to the appeal." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

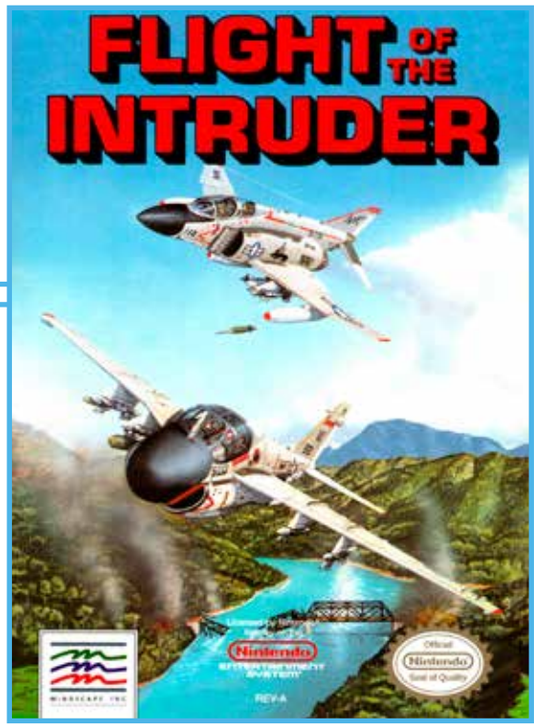


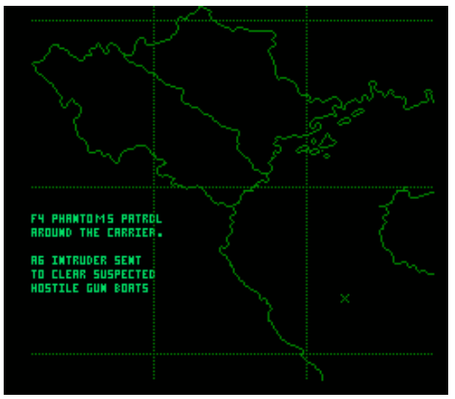




Flight of the Intruder

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player
YEAR: 1991





Flight of the Intruder for the NES is based on the 1990 feature film and on the 1990 computer game. The action takes place in 1972, at the Gulf of Tonkin during the Vietnam War. Faced with 12 missions and more than 50 combat rounds, players as Jake "Cool Hand" Cribbon can fly two planes: the F-14 Phantom all-weather interceptor, which fires at North Vietnamese MiG 21 jets; and the A-6 Intruder all-weather carrier-based strike bomber, which destroys ground and sea targets while avoiding flak and ground-to-air missiles. Viewpoints include cockpit, map, and bombing/strafing, the last of which is from behind the plane. While landing players must consider thrust, altitude, vertical velocity, and range, along with the lowering of the landing gear and arrestor hook. The computer version of the game was originally packaged with a *Flight of the Intruder* paperback novel.

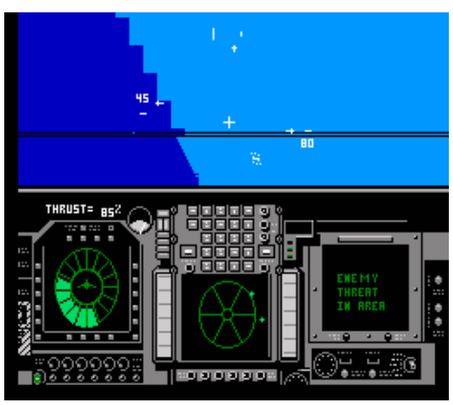
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

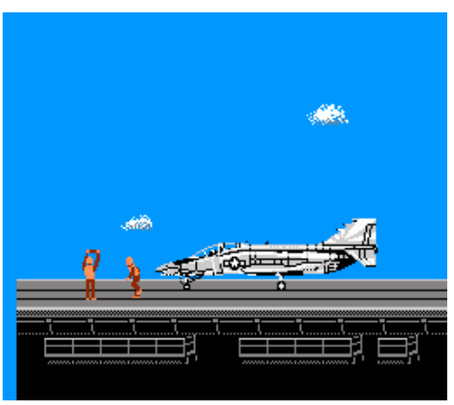
Notable Quotable:
"Another garbage flight simulator. The world really wasn't ready for these in the 8-bit era. I found the game incredibly dull." —Agree or Die (agreeordie.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The aircraft controls are extremely basic, making the experience repetitive soon after the first mission. In both gameplay modes smooth scaling and an effective sense of motion make up for the lack of detail in the environments." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Although there are certainly enough unfriendlies taking potshots at you, another part of the game may prove more difficult: landing your plane on the aircraft carrier . . .by no means a flight simulator. You have only the simplest control over your aircraft and you can't significantly alter your flight path. But it's a good shooter with nice graphics—and it's a bit more challenging than the usual flight combat game." —*Game Players* (August 1991)

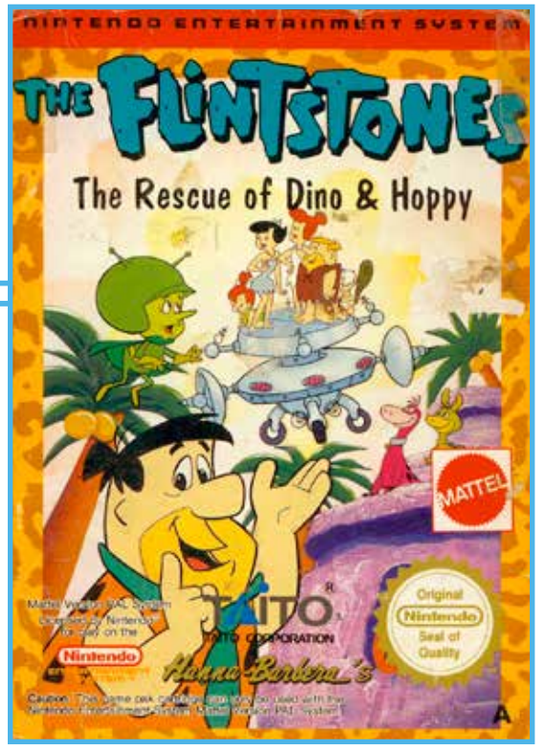
Notable Quotable:
"The landscape is barren and boring. Sky above, water below, and two annoying, gray jets that take a bajillion hits to kill . . . After each mission you must land your plane, and with more skill than you'd think would be necessary. You have to manage thrust, altitude, distance, vertical velocity, and the amount of rage that will inevitably be boiling over each time you try to land your stupid plane." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

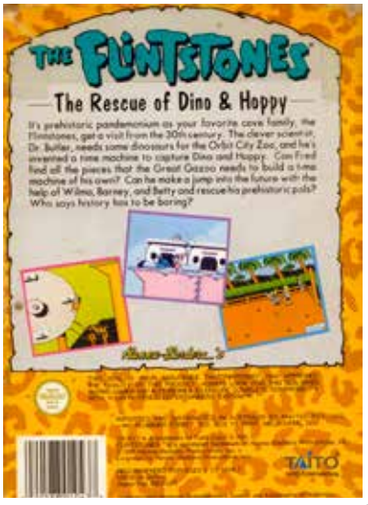


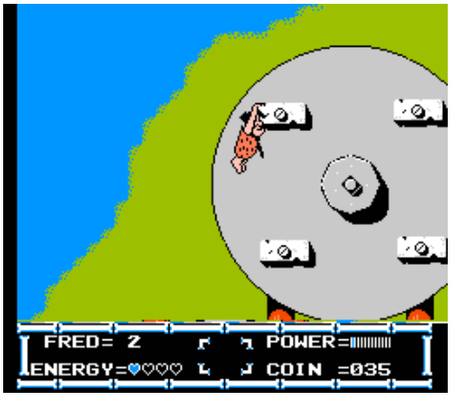


The Flintstones: The Rescue of Dino & Hoppy

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Taito
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1991





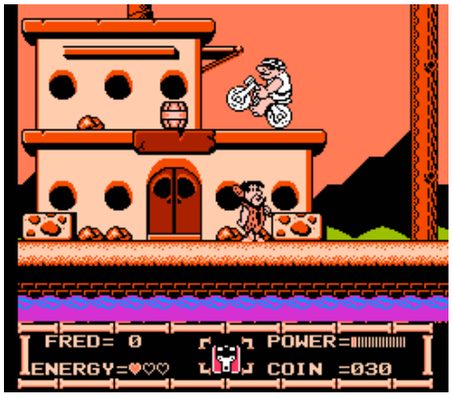


A time traveler from the thirtieth century has kidnapped Dino the dinosaur and Hoppy the hopposaurus. To rescue his beloved pets, Fred Flintstone must help Gazoo rebuild his friendly alien's time machine. The result of this confluence of events is a fun and colorful platformer. Players guide a nicely animated Fred as he runs, jumps, and climbs through jungles, the town of Bedrock, underwater, an ice village, dungeons, the future, and other areas, using his club to hit criminals, dinosaurs, fish, skeletons, and other enemies. He'll also hit barrels that release such helpful items as coins for using long-range weapons, including a slingshot, an axe, and boomasaurus egg bombs. Periodically, Fred will play a side-view, one-on-one basketball game against Hard-Head Harry, where he can win the ability to fly, swim, and jump long distances via Harry's Hoppasaurus. If you prefer you can bypass the basketball (called "basket rock") rounds by simply walking past them on the map screen. The action scrolls vertically at times, and Fred can bounce on shop awnings, get sprung by catapults, negotiate moving platforms, call on Gazoo for help, gobble Bronto Burgers for strength, and hang on to and pull himself up from ledges.

Notable Quotable:
"The crazy caveman antics of Fred Flintstone and his modern Stone Age family are on their way to the NES with the same comic fun that made *The Flintstones* cartoon a TV classic." —*Nintendo Power* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:
A fun game . . .a fair amount of diversity . . . more to this game than hopping from platform to platform . . .a surprisingly good platformer. It has a lot of dimensions and quirks to keep it interesting. I could do without the basketball games, but it's interesting to see that sort of randomness tossed in . . .definitely worth a look." —8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

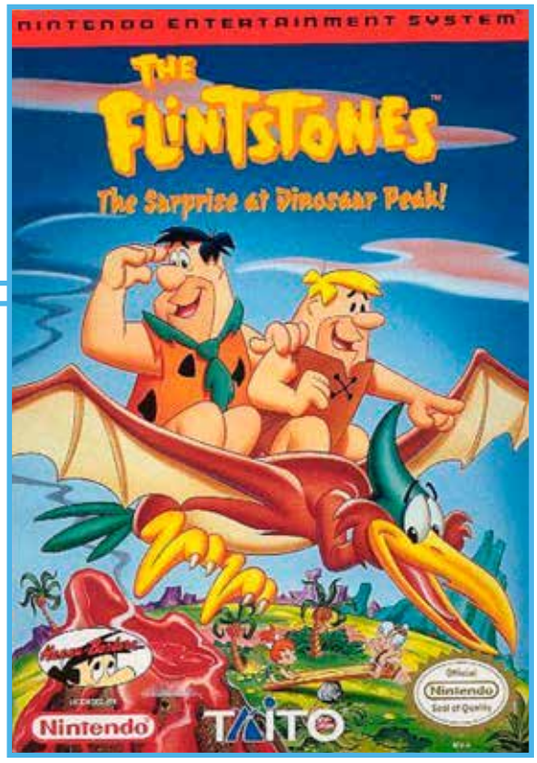
Notable Quotable:
"The Flintstones didn't lose their Stone Age good looks in the translation, even though there's a tad of sprite flicker. However, the music's definitely extinct; low volume serves you well . . .a really cool little 8-bit adventure . . .nice graphics, lots of levels, good gameplay, good challenge and, for those who need them, endless continues." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

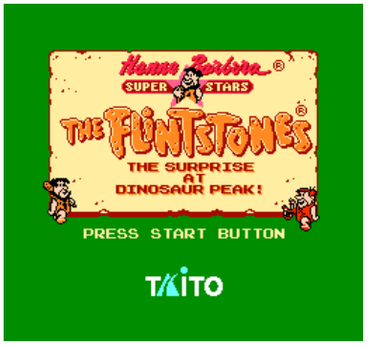


OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Flintstones: The Surprise at Dinosaur Peak!

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Taito
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

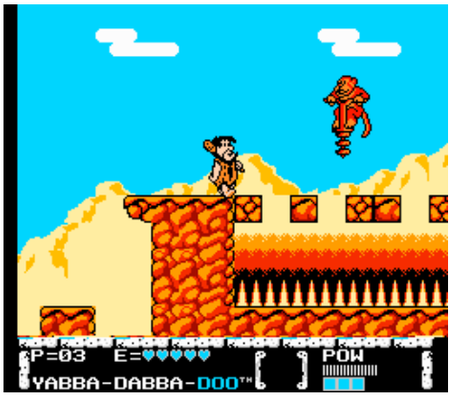




The second Flintstones game for the NES, *The Surprise at Dinosaur Peak!* is much harder to find than *The Rescue of Dino & Hoppy*, but it's just as much fun. Any time players can select between Fred and Barney, which is important for getting past certain areas. Both characters can run, jump, and use items (bowling balls, stone hammers, and the like), but Fred scales cliffs, while Barney climbs poles, ropes, and vines. Also, Fred hits enemies with a club while Barney carries a sling for shooting rocks. There are 12 levels of play, with activities ranging from using crocodiles as trampolines, to battling dinosaurs, to using Pterodactyls to fly over gaps, to riding in mine carts, to playing prehistoric hardball. You'll also run from rolling boulders, walk hand-over-hand on wires, dodge spikey pits, and much more. A pair of mini-games let you play one-on-one basketball and soccer. The variety is impressive indeed. The objective is to rescue Pebbles and Bam-Bam. Fans of the *Flintstones* animated series, which originally ran on ABC during prime time from 1960 to 1966, will especially enjoy the game's cartoon-like graphics and nicely recreated theme song. Unfortunately, the game is extremely rare. Many collectors speculate that it was a Blockbuster rental exclusive and not available for sale on a retail level.

Memories: When popular YouTubers Billy and Jay, a.k.a. The Game Chasers, found a copy of the uber rare *The Flintstones: The Surprise at Dinosaur Peak!* for just $5 at Game Exchange in 2011 and captured it on film I knew it was legit, despite their naysayers. They simply don't plant things to find or do secrets of any kind. I was vindicated by my faith in them in 2013, when a YouTuber named thrashmodule posted a video explaining that he had found the same game for the same price at the same chain of stores. He showed the game and receipt as proof.

Notable Quotable:
"Evokes the spirt of *The Flintstones* cartoons splendidly. The visuals and sounds are all on point . . . I was afraid it was going to be one of those games that cost a stupid amount of money, but no one actually wanted to play it. I was pleasantly surprised . . .health pickups and power-ups are quite abundant, making most levels fairly forgiving . . .a lot of fun. Really plays up the atmosphere and sight gags of the *Flintstones* cartoon . . . I really like the fact that it has two playable characters, which makes the gameplay a little bit more interesting than a lot of other platformers." —Cannot be Tamed (YouTube)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Flying Dragon: The Secret Scroll

PUBLISHER: Culture Brain
DEVELOPER: Culture Brain
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

FLYING DRAGON
The Secret Scroll
Kung-Fu has never been this real!
Set off on a journey of intense adventure!
Six types of fighting!
The shadowy forces of evil await!
CULTURE BRAIN

Flying Dragon boasts an interesting mixture of genres: side-scrolling combat/platforming action, with players punching and kicking ninjas and jumping over obstacles. They can also crouch. Much of the game consists of a third genre—one-on-one fights—with the added twist of having to hit certain areas of the opponent's body marked by red symbols. You control a young man named Ryuhi, who was raised in the mountains and trained by his mentor, Juan, in the art of Kempo. Tusk soldiers rob Juan of the Secret Scrolls of Hiyru-No-Ken, setting the stage for the game, where you fight such opponents as a boxer, a kickboxer, and a wrestler, along with karate, kung-fu, and martial arts experts. RPG-style power-ups, which you acquire by defeating mini-bosses, include increased punching, kicking, and jumping abilities, plus keys for opening doors and cosmic saucers for throwing at enemies.

Notable Quotable:

"*Flying Dragon* has a very strange look and feel. The colors that are used in the game characters appear washed out and seem to blend in with the background. The control is also lacking. The concept is nothing new, and is further muddled by a lack of direction . . .repetitive and not much fun." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

Notable Quotable:

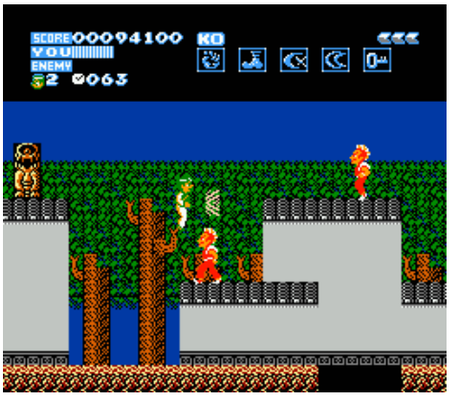
"A poorly executed hybrid of Kung Fu-style fighting, one-on-one combat, and platforming, *Flying Dragon* has inferior graphics and even worse play mechanics. The mere act of walking and jumping is a chore, and collision detection is hit or miss. The only intriguing aspect is the way you gain skills and items after each major opponent you defeat, but this alone is not enough to make the game playable." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Flying Dragon: The Secret Scroll* is an ambitious game. While the back story is inspiring, the two gaming concepts meshed together do not work in harmony; this title would have been best left solely as a fighting game given Culture Brain's previous experience. The mechanics in the tournament segments of *Flying Dragon* are a lot stronger, but the efforts here are unfortunately undone by the platform sections, which are sure to deter most players from delving deeper. Unless you're an absolute die-hard of the now-classic martial arts game genre, look elsewhere for your next fight." —Liam Doolan (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii U

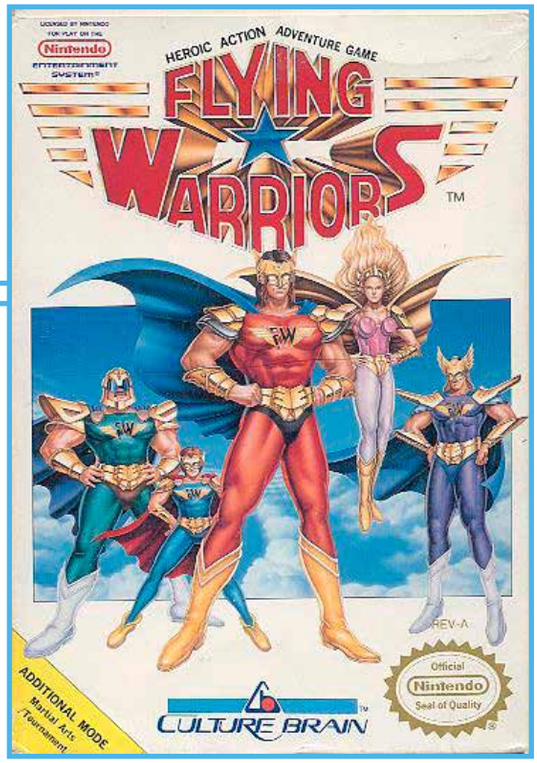
Memories: I've always been intrigued by martial arts and the culture surrounding it but never had any desire to earn a blackbelt. Luckily, there are tons of martial arts video games and movies so I can experience the phenomenon vicariously.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Flying Warriors

PUBLISHER: Culture Brain
DEVELOPER: Culture Brain
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



The sequel to *Flying Dragon: The Secret Scroll*, *Flying Warriors* offers the same type of side-scrolling combat, platforming, and one-on-one fighting action, but improves upon the formula with more accurate controls, superior graphics, and five playable characters. Further, there's an entirely new two-player mode pitting one fighter against another. Throughout the game players can gain RPG-like experience points and collect an assortment of helpful items, including magic water (for health restoration), windy shoes (for revisiting places), bait (for attracting enemy soldiers), arms (for mystic spells), and mirrors (for repelling enemy spells). There are locked doors, secret rooms, and special power-ups at various points in the levels. Characters employ a variety of fighting styles, such as kung-fu, wrestling, boxing, martial arts, kickboxing, or karate. By defeating enemies you'll increase a KO meter which, when full, unleashes a powerful projectile attack.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

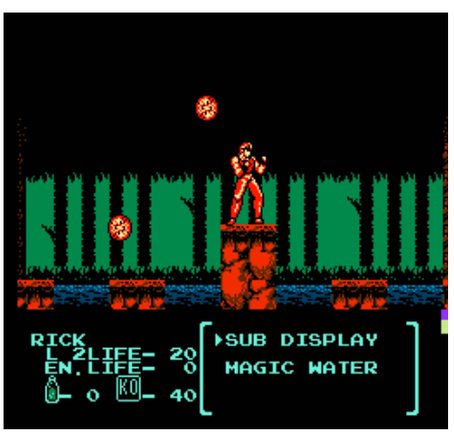
"This game is *Ninja Gaiden* with an obvious strategic overtone . . .learning the attack moves is an interesting way to introduce them, but it slows the game down more than I would have liked . . .a solid entry that stands apart from similar efforts." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1990)

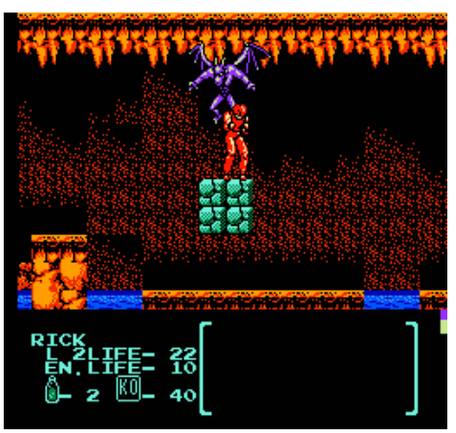
Notable Quotable:

"The graphics and sounds in this game are really solid. Cutscenes have a great art style, despite the strange storyline . . .levels that are full of variety . . .music is triumphant . . .hard rock . . . Japanese-style instrumentation . . . The one-on-one fighting was so busted it crippled the entire experience . . . For the first time in nearly seven years of reviewing games I just couldn't push myself through this game . . . Marred controls and an awkward gameplay mechanic sealed the deal for me here, which is a shame, because I really enjoyed the journey and RPG elements." —Dongled (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"*Flying Warriors* blends genres in ways that could be interesting if everything wasn't so stilted and flawed . . .the levels offer a rather large amount of freedom and numerous spaces to discover. However, thanks to the liberal use of pitfalls, exploring is a less than appealing prospect. Quick and cheap deaths wait around every corner. Rick will fight enemies in these areas, but most of them can be defeated with one swift kick. These enemies pose little actual threat, but they enjoy knocking Rick into those ubiquitous pits or whittling him down thanks to their sheer numbers . . . Graphically, *Flying Warriors* holds its own. The sprites are large, and the whole game sports a gritty, mid-'80s style . . .a nice selection of marital arts styles . . . With more precise controls and unlimited continues (or zero pitfalls) *Flying Warriors* could be amazing." —Julian Titus (www.honestgamers.com)





Formula One: Built to Win

PUBLISHER: SETA
DEVELOPER: Winky Soft
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing/Sports Car Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

FORMULA ONE
BUILT TO WIN
F-1 B.T.W.
SETA
Build Your Skills and Car to Compete Against 32 of the World's Top Drivers!
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
REV-A

Published by Seta, who later released *F1 Roc* and *F-1 Roc II* for the Super Nintendo, *Formula One: Built to Win* is a fast and fun c[illegible]r racer in which players drive a Mini Coop[illegible]ector W2, a Ferrari F40, and a Formula 1[illegible]ion takes place in 10 locales: New York, Detroit, Miami, Yellowstone, Denver, Dallas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Hawaii, and Las Vegas, the last of which features playable slot machines. Success on the various tracks lets gamers increase their ranking and earn cash to purchase faster cars or better car parts, including tires, turbo, engines, and bumpers. If you manage to win all 30 races in the US circuit you'll progress to the international Formula One racing circuit comprised of 16 courses. A Free mode lets you race without other vehicles on the road. As in such games as *Pole Position* (arcade) and *Rad Racer* (NES), the roads twist and turn, there are scenic backgrounds, and the view is from behind (and slightly above) the player's car.

Notable Quotable:

"Innovative and visually pleasing . . . The variety of options, tracks, and features is impressive for a game of this era, but the extra touches, like playing slot machines while in Las Vegas, make it special." —Neo Seeker (www.neoseeker.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I loved most aspects of *Built to Win*. Being able to gradually improve my car and buy upgraded vehicles was a blast, and the sheer number of courses in this game was mind boggling for the time. But I've never been a fan of games changing the rules towards the end. For nearly all this game, while some degree of proficiency was required to advance, I was able to help my cause by purchasing better parts—which gave me a good deal of leeway in the event I didn't navigate a track perfectly. After those first few F-1 races there is no margin for error and nothing I could do to help my cause . . . I simply went from winning every time out to considering myself fortunate to finish fourth or fifth in each eight-car race . . . Still, *Formula One: Built to Win* is a well-designed game . . . Easy to get into and quite addictive." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight: As a kid, I never met a racing game I wouldn't play on the NES. I grew up steeped in racing culture, so it followed that racing video games would become my favorite genre. I'm not sure how, then, I missed something as great as *Formula One: Built to Win*.

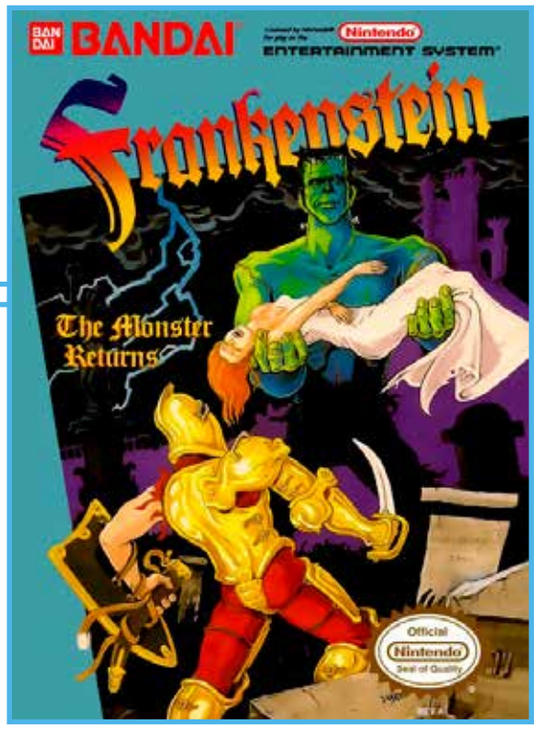
Built to Win checks all the boxes for me. I love any racer that asks me to start at the very bottom of the pile and work my way up to the big leagues through hard work, determination, and undiscovered driving talent. By the time you make it to the top you feel like Lewis Hamilton himself would bow down to you.

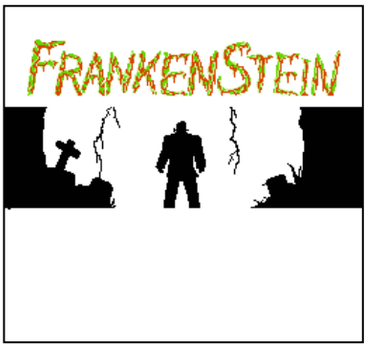
My only regret with *Built to Win* is that I didn't discover it until well into the 21st century. Fifteen-year-old me would never have put this game down! —Greg Sewart, former *EGM* Previews Editor, Producer of Generation 16, Host of Player One Podcast

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Frankenstein: The Monster Returns

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1991





For years and years the Frankenstein monster lay in his grave and the villagers lived in peace, trying to forget the death and destruction he caused. Unfortunately, lightning struck his old tombstone and now he is risen from the dead, laid waste to the city, and kidnapped a girl named Emily. As a brave villager intent on rescuing the damsel in distress, you must work your way through four levels, jumping on platforms, using keys to open doors, climbing stairs and cliffs, and battling warthogs, bonefish, purple dogs, demon horses, water dragons, evil statues, Dracula, Medusa, and of course the Frankenstein monster himself. You can punch, execute jump kicks, use a club and a mace, wield a sword, and grab power-ups for hurling fireballs (including three-way fire). You'll even swing on ropes. Areas to battle through include a forest, a sewer, a graveyard, and an Evil Dimension. The game includes cutscenes and lots of text and is hard to find.

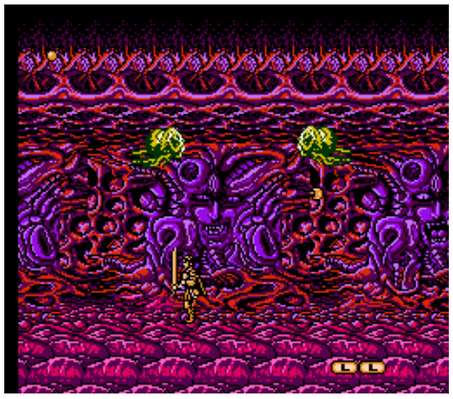
Memories: I'm a huge fan of the Frankenstein monster, especially Boris Karloff's portrayal in the classic Universal films. I like the Hammer films as well, so I'm always intrigued when the creature stars in a video game. I enjoyed *Frankenstein* for the Atari 2600 far more than *Frankenstein: The Monster Returns*, but this game is certainly playable. And it's superior to *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* for the Super Nintendo, which admittedly isn't saying much.

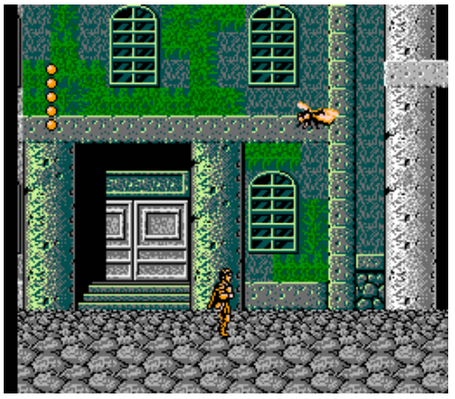
Notable Quotable:

"I like some of the basic set-ups that the game delivers, but it just comes off as being a little too rough around the edges. The graphics are cool . . .lack of real diversity . . . With a little more attention to detail and some final tweaking it could have been a hit . . .only a little bit better than average . . .the control isn't precise enough . . . Overall it is cool, with a few minor quirks to overlook." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The enemies in this game are kind of creative. They're completely illogical and incredibly annoying to fight, but they are sort of inspired in an off-the-wall way . . . There are a grand total of four stages . . . Rather than lengthening the game through legit means, like adding some puzzles, Bandai chose the much simpler route of punishing you for playing . . . Control is decent . . . The music is par for the course for a subpar NES title . . . Environments are pretty sparse, and characters usually only get two colors each. But the sprites themselves are well done." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Freedom Force

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1988

A group of terrorists known as the Unknown Guerillas has captured an airport. Enter Rad Rex and Manic Jackson of the Freedom Force. As one of these enforcers, you'll plough through round after round of first-person shooter action, each round consisting of several airport scenes, the Unknown Guerilla Hideout, and a special code breaker challenge stage where you shoot letters. Armed with the Zapper light gun, you fire at any guerillas that get in your way, including pistol-packing, grenade-throwing bagmen and elite assassins that pop up at random in doors and windows. You must also face Eugene Extreme, a cowardly yet ambitious leader and terrorist mastermind. Avoid shooting passengers, kids, flight attendants, and other innocents (shooting six will take you back to Scene 1 of the round). If you run out of ammo or are shot 12 times (without picking up extra health) you'll die. As you progress through the rounds—which scroll horizontally—you can shoot icons to give you more health, extra ammo, and one of three different weapons: a .38 caliber gun, a .44 magnum, and a grenade launcher. Be careful, though, there's also one target type designed to make the game harder.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

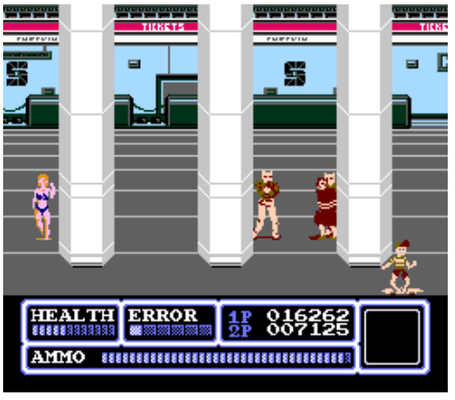
"They've made the best use yet of the Zapper gun by building a game around a theme that's as topical as the evening news: the taking of hostages by terrorists . . . The game is very realistic, complete with splotches of red that appear on the chests of the terrorists when you shoot them. It's a game that will appeal to all ages with its sharpshooting action and topical storyline." —*Computer Entertainer* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"A cut above the rest . . .the terrorists all wear the same colored outfits, making them pretty easy to distinguish from the civilians . . .nifty graphics. I love how the bad guys fall out of windows when shot and the tied-up hostages also look exceptional. The gun control is dead-on and the difficulty ramps in a gradual manner. The stages are linear, but enemies tend to pop up at random, so you can't just memorize the game." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Freedom Force* gets most of the basics down, and you can go quite a bit just gunning down Bagmen before you start to notice the cracks in the game design. The game is designed to trick and kill you, and it doesn't really feel all that fair when either happens, reducing it from an acceptable shooting gallery to one that you'll lose interest in quickly. Had the game placed the power-ups, health, and ammo in the stage instead of a box where you have no time to shoot the good ones, *Freedom Force* would have certainly improved its issues with very little target variety and unjust difficulty. It certainly seems like the limitations exist mostly to pad the game's short length, with only a few short stages and some awful hangman segments before it sets you on another loop of the game." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)



Friday the 13th

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Atlus
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

The famous—some would say infamous—1980 slasher film *Friday the 13th* inspired numerous theatrical sequels and this game for the NES. The game takes place at Camp Crystal Lake, where players alternate control between six camp counselors, each varying in terms of speed, jumping ability, and starting position. The objective is to explore the area and keep children safe from serial killer Jason Vorhees (he of the hockey mask and machete). Three viewpoints are used: a top-down map; a side-view perspective where players throw stones at wolves, zombies, crows, bats, and a weapon-wielding Jason himself (who can appear at any time); and a behind-the-counselor view inside maze-like cabins. In the cabins you can get clues, light fireplaces (with a lighter obtained from a zombie), and switch counselors, or give weapons and vitamins to another counselor. Along the pathways you can find throwing knives, keys, and vitamins for restoring your health. As the game progresses you can acquire stronger projectile weapons like axes, machetes, and pitchforks by finding them, or by defeating the disembodied head of Jason's mother in a cave. Audio cues warn that Jason is attacking children in the lakeside cabins or your fellow counselors, prompting you to row across the lake or travel by foot to intervene. When all the kids and counselors die the game will end.

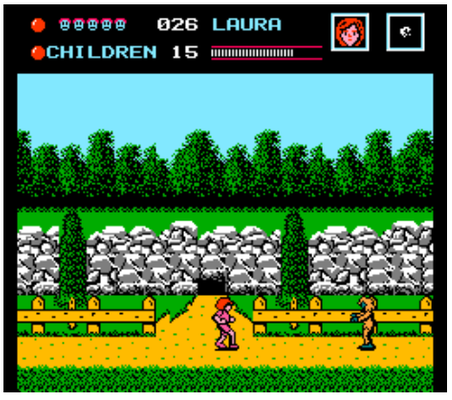
Notable Quotable:

"The game gets quite frantic in higher levels . . .graphics are pretty good. All the counselors look markedly different from one another, and Jason has his familiar gray outfit with the trademark hockey mask. The backgrounds are nice as well, conveying a serene environment that hides the true horror of the camp." —*Classic Gamer Magazine* #3 (Spring, 2000)

Insider Insight: As a kid I was afraid to watch horror movies, including *Friday the 13th* and its sequels. One of my older friends had *Friday the 13th* on the NES, and he would pretty much force the game on me. I was absolutely terrified of the images and the music. Everything about the game gave me the creeps. When Jason popped out I threw the controller up in the air and begged my "friend" to stop making me play it.

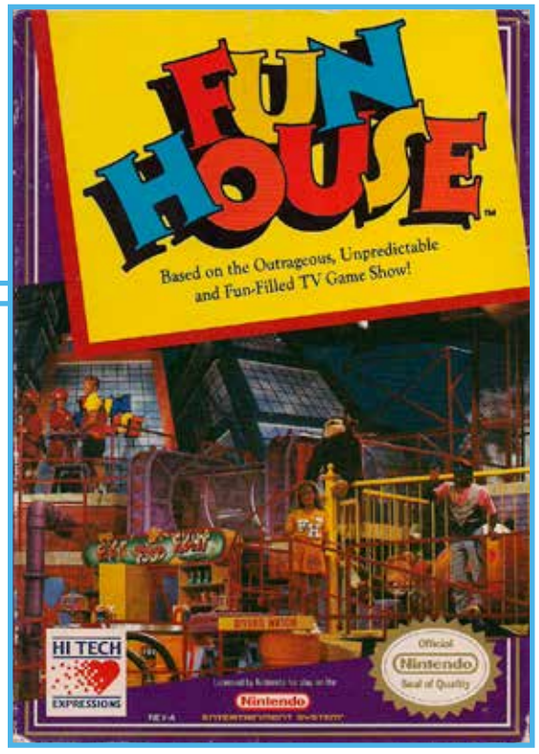
Ironically enough, when I got older, *Friday the 13th* became my favorite horror movie franchise. I love the lore and most of the movies. Naturally, I had to pick up this game and give it another shot. Unlike most people, who hate it and say it is poorly made, I think it's a great game that was way ahead of its time. The strategies, the snooping around, the trial and error, the need to figure out what weapons work best against Jason, the survival horror elements—there's not another game like it. —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Fun House

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions
DEVELOPER: Ironwood Software/ Realtime Associates
GAME TYPE: Game Show/Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991


FUN HOUSE
Based on the Outrageous, Unpredictable and Fun-Filled TV Game Show!
HI TECH EXPRESSIONS
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality
Nintendo

Named after the 1988–1991 children's game show, but ultimately having little to do with it outside of branding, the bland but endless *Fun House* finds you trapped in an infinitely large house. Equipped with a pair of roller blades and an endless supply of tomatoes, you must find your way out of each room (there are 72 overhead-view rooms in all) within a given period of time. As you skate through each room you must throw tomatoes at all the targets while avoiding blobs that bounce you back, boingers that spin you out of control, launchers that fire bananas and banana chips, and spray guns that fire red schmutz balls. Some targets are numbered and must be knocked down in sequence. The last target holds a key for unlocking the entrance to the next room. Slime-covered ramps, moving floors, and icy floors make the game a challenge, but each room has a different name that is a clue to the solution of that room. The rooms are designed using a wide variety of rich color schemes (though there is a lot of gray) and clearly drawn floor patterns, and the music features some elaborate sound combinations. The game, which is neither a brain-straining puzzler nor an intense shooter, has no health meter; the only way to die is to run out of time.

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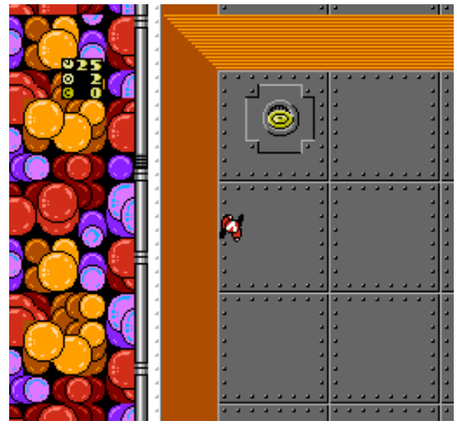
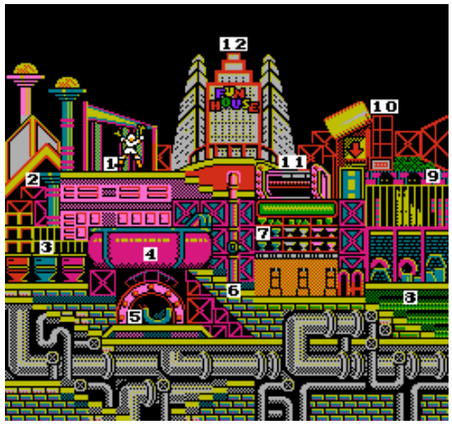
Notable Quotable:

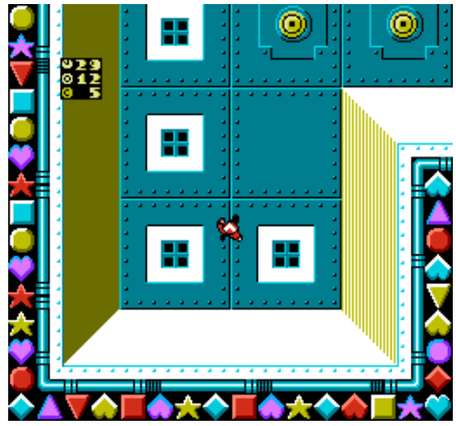
"*Fun House* is mediocre at best, but the worst aspect of the game is that it has NO BEARING WHATSOEVER to the TV show . . .repetitive and boring . . . The graphics are bright colors, but when did you watch the show and see circles and triangles as the audience?" – UKNESBOY (uknesboy.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"An incredibly simplistic game disguised as difficult due to its abominable control scheme . . . The d-pad is only used to turn you, while A actually moves you forward. Since the game employs a top-down view I can understand the need for non-conventional controls, but I never got used to it . . . Thankfully the game's easy enough in its own right, but that's no reason for you to play." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)







Galactic Crusader

PUBLISHER: Bunch Games
DEVELOPER: Sachen
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1990

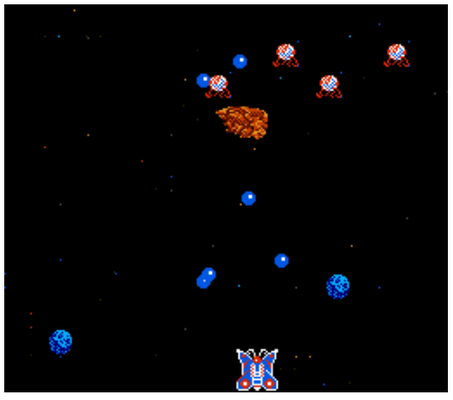
With its solid black backgrounds, simplistic-looking (if colorful) enemies (which move in seemingly random zigzagging and curving patterns), and basic yet rapid-fire gameplay, *Galactic Crusader* is a throwback to the pre-NES generation of consoles, which for me is a good thing. You pilot a metamorphic starship as it flies up the screen, firing away at space corals, urchin crafts, poisonous ticks, dragon wasps, corrosive spiders, and other such enemies while avoiding them and their bullets. The starship can morph from a huge flying insect into a metallic destroyer and can attach and detach special firing devices to and from its front and rear. Additional firepower—pulsar waves, plasma blasts, and corkscrew bullets—is obtained via weapon capsules. There are six bosses to battle, including Cubicus (beware his hydraulic extensions), Gorous (home to a band of blood-sucking bats), Spirous (who extends long arms to locate and destroy your ship), and Dragon King (who breathes fire). Each takes many hits to defeat. While it may appear primitive in both look and sound, *Galactic Crusader* is nevertheless a fun, challenging shooter with a cool power-up system and ample old-school gaming charms. Unlicensed and hard to find.

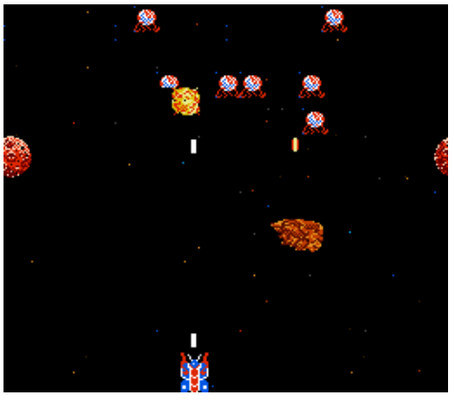
Memories: I collect NES games, but I'm not a completist when it comes to boxed carts; however, when I saw my buddy Jeff Cooper (former *Digital Press* fanzine writer and former owner of the largest video game collection in Oklahoma) selling a complete copy of *Galactic Crusader* in nice condition in 2014 at a gaming convention in Dallas for a very reasonable $50, I had to grab it. The rudimentary nature of the game reminded me of being a teenager, playing such now-classic consoles as the Atari 5200 and ColecoVision for hours on end with few other responsibilities. From time to time I'll plug the light blue cartridge into my NES toaster and settle in for some button mashing fun. If you like *Star Force* you should enjoy this game, at least to some degree.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

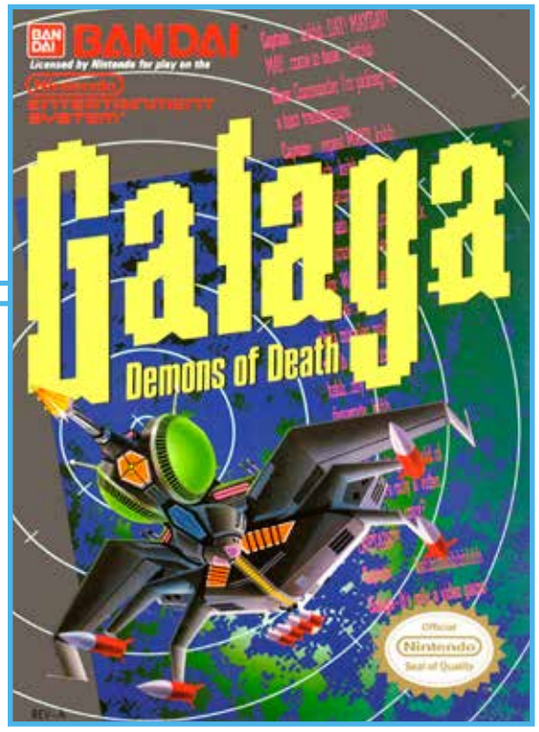
"*Galactic Crusader* is an exceedingly basic and repetitive shooter in which you control a mechanical looking butterfly against a series of generic enemies. Each time you're hit your ship shrinks, until finally exploding. The graphics and music are embarrassingly primitive for a game released in 1990." — Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

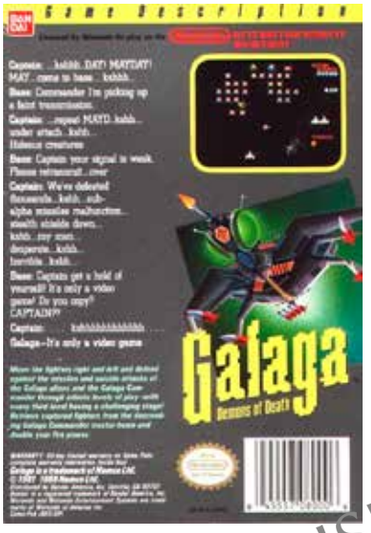




Galaga: Demons of Death

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Namco
GAME TYPE: Fixed Screen Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1988





Despite tinny sound effects, somewhat easier gameplay, and the odd addition of "Demons of Death" to the title, *Galaga* for the NES is otherwise a near-note-for-note port of Namco's timeless 1981 arcade game (which is the sequel to *Galaxian*). Players guide a fighter spaceship right and left along the bottom of the screen, shooting upward at waves of zigzagging ships and bug-like aliens that fly out onto the screen, gather into formation near the top, and then dive-bomb like crazy. The two most memorable aspects of the coin-op classic—the challenge stages, in which players fire with impunity, and the dual firing technique, which is achieved by freeing a captured ship—are kept fully intact, helping make this a retro favorite among NES owners.

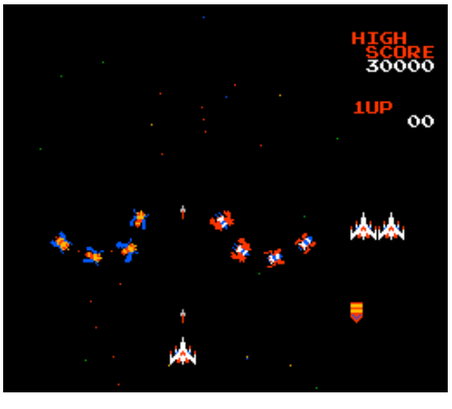
Many gamers allow their ship to get captured on purpose because doubling your firepower is not only a useful technique (especially in the challenging stages, where you can't be destroyed), but it's super fun; however, it does make you a wider target.

Memories: Whether I'm playing *Galaga* on the NES or on the upright cabinet in my game room at home (it is the one arcade game I own—I bought it from *Digital Press* fanzine alumnus Jeff Cooper, who once had the biggest console video game collection in Oklahoma), I always double up my ships any time I have a chance. It's simply more enjoyable that way, even though it may not always be the best strategy for advancing in the game.

Notable Quotable:
"Practically identical to the arcade game . . .noticeably easier than the arcade version, so *Galaga* veterans are likely to tally some big scores. Holding down the fire button allows for continuous shooting (and less wear on your thumb), but you'll fire twice as fast by tapping it. If you have a Nintendo Advantage joystick this is an ideal game to use it with." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"One of the best arcade games around in the comfort of your own home . . .gameplay is simple and intuitive, with quick movement and responsive firing . . . Because the levels increase in speed and difficulty each time, the challenge stays fresh. I keep trying to top my own high scores; it's just too bad the cartridge doesn't save them. While I enjoyed the graphics and gameplay, I found the sound lacking. There wasn't really much here but occasional music and repetitive sound effects. One can only hear the screaming sound of an alien spacecraft or the laser blast of one's own ship so many times before turning the television's volume knob to zero." —David Buck (nintendotimes.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Old-school shooting action at its best . . .gamers who still have fond memories of the original will find all the arcade action they love here, only without the coin slot . . .an excellent addition to any NES library, especially for fans of the 'Golden Era' of arcade games." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net)



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Galaxy 5000: Racing in the 51st Century

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Activision
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing/Futuristic Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991

A futuristic racer with plenty of combat, *Galaxy 5000* is similar to *R.C. Pro-Am*, but is set in the fifty-first century and features jumping. Players race their armored turbocraft around twisting, turning tracks on nine different planets (this was when Pluto was still considered a planet), trying to beat three other cars. Finding and using shortcuts on most of the tracks is a key to success. In two-player mode, gamers earn bonus points by getting a screen's length ahead of the other player's vehicle (à la *Auto Racing* for the Intellivision). There are five turbocraft models, each outfitted with two different weapons (machine gun, guided missiles, bombs, fireballs, and the like) for use in destroying obstacles and other cars. Earned money is used to repair the turbocraft or purchase a new one. Two different control schemes are available.

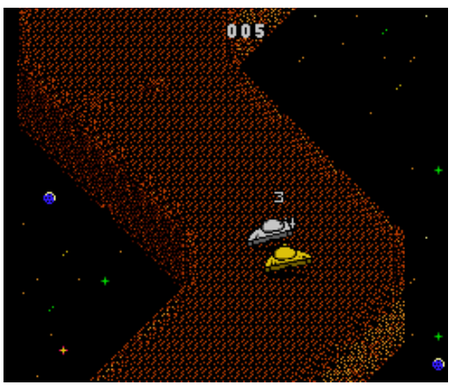
Notable Quotable:
"*Galaxy 5000* is a galactically good time. Race alone or with a friend, but you're never alone, since all four ships are always in play. From jumping and shooting to crafty driving, you'll have to hone your skills, since each race increases in difficulty. This is a fun game!" – 8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Only a small portion of the track is shown at one time, so two-player simultaneous racing is somewhat difficult. Since the cars can never be more than a screen length apart the game is more of a test of teamwork than it is competition. As a one-player game, though, it's fast and fun." —*Nintendo Power* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The opening presentation screen is a hoot . . . The graphics in the game itself are excellent, with neat, well-animated sprites and brilliantly fluid scrolling. The racing is frantic, and learning to control your craft is half the battle . . .lots of things to see and do on the racetracks . . . The game can only really be described as a cross between *F-Zero* and *Super Sprint*. It takes the best gameplay features from both, and the combination is one of the best racers available on the Nintendo . . .groovy sampled speech." —*Computer and Video Games* (October 1991)

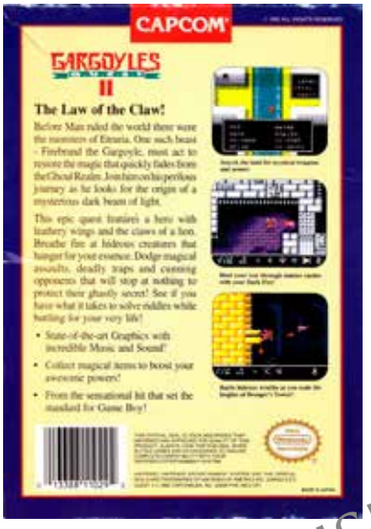
Notable Quotable:
"Although it might not look like much, *Galaxy 5000* is simply brilliant! It starts off really easy but quickly powers-up to a deadly, no-holds-barred barge 'em out—which is just how I like my racing games! *R.C. Pro-Am* was like that, but whereas that got a tad boring after a while, *Galaxy 5000* gives you a real sense of progress by giving you different turbocraft to fly and increasingly hazardous courses to test your accelerator on. Your opponents also race harder the farther you get into the game, leaping maniacally across corners wherever they can and forcing you to do the same to keep up! The presentation screens showing the very square-looking turbocraft aren't as impressive as they could have been but the game graphics make up for all that. They're really fast and smooth, and they're complimented perfectly by the sampled 'Scuse me!', 'Watch it!', and 'WAH-WAIIIEEEE!' sound effects." —*Mean Machines* (October 1991)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Gargoyle's Quest II: The Demon Darkness

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Platform
Shooter/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



As in the original *Gargoyle's Quest* for the Game Boy, *Gargoyle's Quest II: The Demon Darkness* for the NES puts players in control of the winged and clawed gargoyle enemy from *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, who now is a protagonist. In the side-scrolling platform areas (dungeons, bridges, and the like) Firebrand (called Red Devil in *Ghosts 'n Goblins*) can walk, jump, cling to walls, fly, and shoot magic fireballs at the various colorful enemy creatures he will encounter. You can add other magic to Firebrand's arsenal, including blockbuster (destroys blocks that get in the way), claw (lets Firebrand climb up spikes with impunity), essence of soulstream (regains lost stamina), and darkfire (the most powerful magic of all). During the overhead-view world map areas Firebrand talks to zombies, ghouls, and other characters to gain helpful items and advance the storyline. New to the series are magic tornadoes Firebrand can use as platforms for reaching high areas. His objective is to investigate a mysterious black light that drained magic from the land and defeat the being responsible, King Breager. Highly recommended if you can find it for a decent price.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

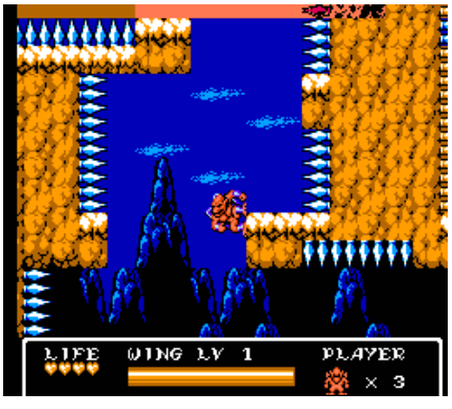
"The game adds an extra edge to RPGs by placing action sequences throughout the adventure. A brilliant idea that will appeal to both types of players. Filled with good graphics and decent sound, this is one sequel that was worth making. With challenging action scenes and a long quest, this will keep you busy for a while." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The game looks superb; everything is finely polished with an incredible attention to detail. The overworld is probably the weakest link, but it plays a minor role, and the game mainly focuses on the side-scrolling action scenes . . .notoriously difficult . . .controls (especially the flying ability) take some time to get used to, and some stages are painfully frustrating. Everything kills you in this game, even platforms shoot at you . . .an awesome and fun game, but be aware of its sheer difficulty" —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

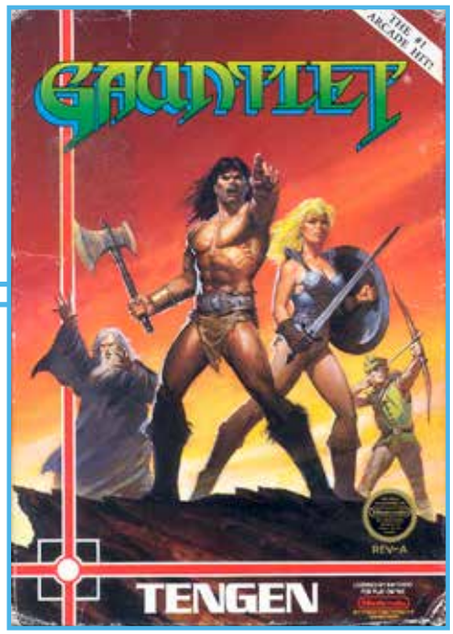
Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are both colorful and attractive. However, when it comes to intricate detailing, this 8-bit version doesn't rank as high as the Game Boy original. Firebrand isn't as ghoulish-looking as he was in the Game Boy cart . . .the level of role play isn't complex, nor compelling . . . The action sequences tend to get a bit meatier as you progress farther into the game . . . Firebrand responds very well to button commands . . .isn't as difficult or as fun as the original Game Boy version, which had a better balance of RPG and fly 'n' fight . . .fully capable of providing both novice and advanced gamers with quite a few hours of moderately challenging enjoyment." —*GamePro* (July 1992)



Gauntlet

PUBLISHER: Tengen
DEVELOPER: Tengen
GAME TYPE: Maze Shooter/Adventure, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1987



Although it retains the basic gameplay and all four playable characters from Atari's 1985 arcade original, *Gauntlet* for the NES lacks the four-player mode, and it has a number of differences (it's essentially a remake), including 100 all new levels, the last of which contains a sacred orb that is accessible if players have collected all the digits of a password hidden in clue rooms from earlier levels. The NES game also has moveable walls (à la *Gauntlet II*) and a spiffy new title screen, but is missing the many onscreen hints (such as "save keys to open doors") and memorable voice effects (such as "Elf needs food badly"). The view of this quickly paced dungeon crawler is from overhead, with players, as a warrior (equipped with a battle axe), elf (bow and arrows), wizard (strong magic), or valkyrie (sword, shield), scurrying around five worlds (including Castle, Dark Forest, and Lost Caverns) shooting monsters (which re-spawn via generators), grabbing keys to open doors, collecting treasure, drinking potions (for speed, power, and health), and searching for the exits. Although originally released with Nintendo's blessing, *Gauntlet* was later re-released as an unlicensed game.

Memories: When I walked into The Land of Oz arcade in 1985 and saw four people gathered around a new game called *Gauntlet* and playing it at the same time I was in utter amazement. It looked like such a cool game. It wasn't the first four-player coin-op, but it sure opened up a lot of possibilities for future games to exploit this type of multi-player action. I played it a few times solo that day but quickly realized it was an absolute quarter gobbler, so I was glad when the game came to the NES and I could play it again and again for free and get much farther into the levels.

Notable Quotable:
"THE definitive home version . . .we've seen the computer versions, and Tengen's version outshines them all . . .sparkling, colorful graphics and highly challenging play action . . .you just can't stop playing . . .smooth control, wonderful sound." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"This game combines the best qualities of a shoot-'em-up cartridge with those of a quest game. And it's faster moving than just about any adventure on the market! The colors and animation are superb, and the musical score, with its harpsichord-like sounds, is a knockout." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Gone is the digitized voice that offers helpful hints and warns of imminent death, though the grunts of your character do remain, albeit in a far more muffled form. The graphics are also noticeably inferior to the arcade version, which was par for the course in those days. Despite the technical inferiority, the NES version of *Gauntlet*'s 100 levels, two-player simultaneous gameplay, and some welcome additions to the formula by way of increasing character statistics make it my preferred version of the classic quarter muncher. It may not look very pretty, and it's nigh impossible, but it sure is fun to try." —p1start.typepad.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gauntlet

Insider Insight: One day, back in 1989, I was stoked to see the NES version of *Gauntlet* on the video store shelf because it was a coin-op favorite of mine, and because I had borrowed an NES console from a friend. There was a hurricane warning for Puerto Rico that weekend so I had rushed to the video store to grab a game before everything closed down. I knew the power would go out soon and I wanted to get as much playtime in as possible before it happened. School was canceled the next day so I didn't have to go to bed early.

The lights never went out that Thursday night! Things were calm, and it looked like we had maybe avoided the storm's wrath. A three-day weekend with a fun game sounded great, but I had barely woken up on Friday before my mom came into my room and told me to pack up my stuff. Hurricane Hugo had decided to make landfall in Puerto Rico after all. Facing possible flash flooding, we headed to the nursing home where she worked. It had been designated a refuge center and we were to only take the essentials. I asked my mom if I could take my TV. It was a 13-inch black-and-white set, not big enough to take up too much room. Thankfully, she said yes.

The storm didn't do much on my side of the island, but we did get lots of rain and wind. We had power all night thanks to the home's generator, and I stayed up until the wee hours playing *Gauntlet*. There I was, a 16-year-old kid sitting alone in the middle of that massive dining room, my TV and console perched on a giant table. Save for the howling wind and water outside there was total silence. Only the sounds of Thyra the Valkyrie battling the endless hordes of demons, wizards, and grunts challenged nature's fury!

I was never scared that weekend. My mom came in occasionally to check on me, but otherwise I got to spend an entire night playing video games and eating snacks in peace. That kind of gaming environment is often hard to find, and it only took a category 3 hurricane for me to finally enjoy it! —Ken Horowitz, administrator of Sega-16.com, author of *The Sega Arcade Revolution: A History in 62 Games* and *Playing at the Next Level: A History of American Sega Games*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gauntlet II

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Tengen
GAME TYPE: Maze Shooter/Adventure, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

The top-down action of this sequel evokes the original installment as players trek through more than 100 treasure-rich overhead dungeon mazes, shooting battle axes, swords, magic, or arrows (depending on the character) at such enemies as ghosts, demons, and sorcerers. Selectable characters are Thor the Warrior (tough skin, excellent shot power, superior hand-to-hand combat, poor magic power), Thyra the Valkyrie (shield armor, poor shot power, good hand-to-hand combat, moderate magic power), Merlin the Wizard (no armor, good shot power, poor hand-to-hand combat, excellent magic power), or Questor the Elf (leather armor, poor shot power, moderate hand-to-hand combat, very good magic power). The catacombs are riddled with hidden rooms, transporters, monster generators, and moving exits that the player must reach to advance to the next rooms. Finding food will restore players' dwindling health points, and potions give players extra armor, magic power, speed, attack power, and more. Scores of enemies on screen at once create slowdown, and the seemingly endless gameplay will make things feel overly repetitious for some gamers, but fans of the series will have fun with the cartridge thanks to lots of shooting and the familiar diversity of the four protagonists. The graphics are a little bland, and there's no in-game music, but the game retains two arcade components lacking in the original NES port: voice effects (scratchy though they may be) and, more importantly, four-player action. Plus there are acid pools, reflective shots that ricochet off walls, large fire-breathing dragons, and a player who is "it," meaning the monsters will gang up on that player's character. This is a fine arcade port and sequel, albeit tough, so tackling it with two or more players may be best. Based on Atari's 1986 coin-op classic.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"*Gauntlet II* does an excellent job of gathering up all the elements from the coin-op and putting tons of enemies on the screen at once. In the process the game goes from what was a 78 record in the arcades to being a 33 at home. It's there, but it's slow . . .a good translation of the arcade game . . .but the game lacks appeal because of washed out graphics and slow, repetitive play . . .so much flicker and slowdown." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:

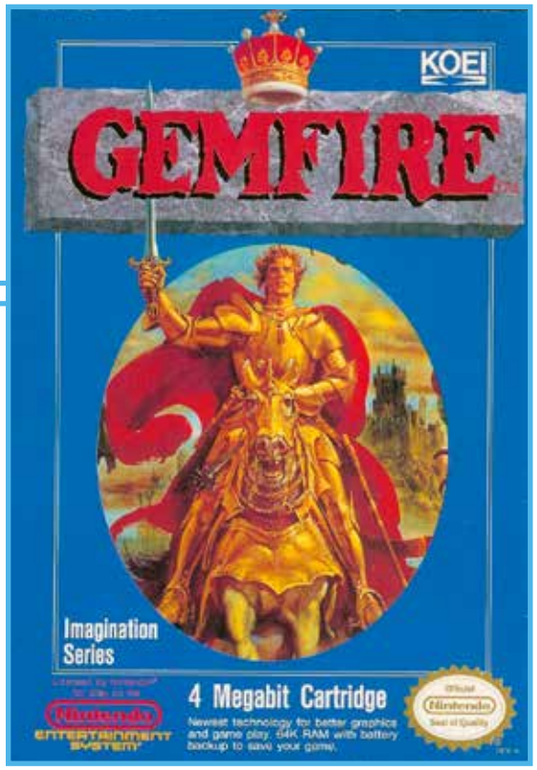
"I'm a great fan of the *Gauntlet* games, and *Gauntlet II* simply blew me away. Graphically excellent and audibly superb . . .a level of addictiveness that just doesn't let up, no matter how repetitive the action may seem . . .fans of the genre and the coin-op would do well to grab it . . . What an astonishing conversion . . .stunning graphics and awesome special effects . . .one of the finest coin-op conversions I've ever seen on an 8-bit system . . .all the fun and action of the original machine . . .when played with two or more players it's one of the most enjoyable games you'll play on the Nintendo." —*Mean Machines* (March 1991)

Insider Insight: While the NES port of the original *Gauntlet* was a fine game, it certainly wasn't a good conversion, as it deviated from the coin-op quite dramatically. This certainly wasn't unusual for the NES. In fact, it's probably harder to name ports that actually stayed authentic to their arcade parents, but I was nevertheless very disappointed when I first played *Gauntlet*, especially since the rival Master System conversion was so close to the coin-op. Tengen must have picked up on some of the negative feelings about NES *Gauntlet* because they truly redeemed themselves with this excellent conversion of the game's sequel.

I picked up *Gauntlet II* a few years ago on Facebook marketplace and wasn't expecting much, having been let down by the original. So imagine my surprise when I saw a game that not only looked like the arcade original, but it also sounded like it—yes, it has all that glorious digitized speech! As if that wasn't enough, the port even supports four players at once, just like the arcade game. I'd go out on a limb and say that *Gauntlet II* is the best arcade conversion on the NES. It's certainly the most accurate, and with an extra three controllers hooked up it remains one of the best Nintendo games to play with your friends. Now I better get going—Red Warrior needs food badly! —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

Gemfire

PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Koei
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



A nice title for patient gamers, *Gemfire* puts players on a quest to reunite several different gems (each housing a wizard or a sorceress) with a magical crown and free Princess Robyn, who has been put in jail by King Eselred, the evil ruler of Ishmeria. Using a combination of military and domestic tactics, players must unite all the provinces of the land under one banner. This entails cultivating crops, protecting provinces, trading for food and gold, plundering neighboring provinces, gaining the support of the people, expanding into other lands, transporting resources to another territory, hiring creatures to fight wars, recruiting vassals from other rulers, using diplomacy to forge alliances, buying skilled fighters (six types), and much more, including dealing with natural disasters. Armies consist of five units, each with its own powers and ranges of attack: cavalry, infantry (which claims two units), archers, and a special unit consisting of mercenaries, monsters, wizards, and sorceresses. Battles are viewed from an angled/overhead perspective, with players selecting from such options as wait, move, command unit, build fence, and retreat. There are four types of commands: military, development, negotiation, and miscellaneous. Watch out for pixies that destroy your crops and hobgoblins that steal your gold. A map screen delineates the 30 provinces of Ishmeria; the other main view is the battlefield.

Notable Quotable:
"As with most Koei games, you get your money's worth here . . . The cart's CPU does a great job of orchestrating all the action and quickly calculating the appropriate consequences when you make a decision . . .best-looking 8-bit Koei cart yet. Its battles are particularly well executed . . .the easiest Koei cart to learn how to play." — *GamePro* (April 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Controls are simple and the learning curve level for a Koei strategy game . . .negotiation tactics are worthless, as they either do not provide enough to warrant a spent turn or they fail miserably unless the lord has ridiculously high charisma . . . Fighting isn't as easy as holding down a button, as a fair amount of strategy is required to win. Each territory has a different landscape and troop positioning is a key element. Knowing when to advance, retreat, and swap fresh troops for vanquished ones is required for victory. However, battles are a bit clunky, and they sometimes seem to take a little longer than they should . . . When swords clash nifty animation sequences depict the action. However, these visuals add even more time to the already long battles; fortunately, Koei had the foresight to include a toggle to turn animations off . . .the computer's artificial intelligence is terrible . . .decent music . . .would be more fun if the computer was more aggressive." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Genghis Khan

PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Koei
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

The third in a trilogy of historical simulators from Koei (after *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), *Genghis Khan* lets players assume the role of King Richard the Lion-Hearted, Emperor Alexious III, Shogun Minamoto Yoritomo, or even the titular warlord himself. The game takes place in the twelfth century, and the goal is to unify the 14 tribes of the Mongul Plains (in Mongul Conquest mode) or the entire world (in World Conquest mode). This involves collecting taxes, drafting and hiring troops, purchasing food and weapons (daggers, swords, axes, lances, pikes, and bombs), sending out spies, attacking other countries, marrying off daughters, managing rebellions, coping with hostile weather, and much more. Players monitor map screens and select from numerous text menus, and the key to success is to understand how each of the commands given affects all the factors in the game and to plan subsequent moves accordingly. Adapted from the 1989 computer game.

Notable Quotable:

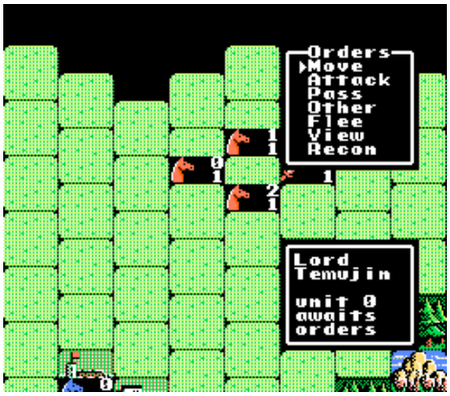
"The game takes forever, even with a good strategy. Dealing with supporting forward provinces at the end game takes hours. Just figuring out what to do to prevent rebellions and build up troops against countries that have huge armies is complicated and often ends in failure either way . . . I was bored long before I finished, and mostly kept playing just to see the ending screens." —Richard Kenig (lonesomecow.ca)

Notable Quotable:

"The scope of this game is pretty darn impressive for the time . . .this game is all about time, energy, resource, and personnel management, and success in the game is very much dependent on simply practicing and playing extensively to learn the ins and outs of the game's mechanics. It's no exaggeration to say that each time a person plays this game it will be a different experience . . .one of the most mind-bogglingly difficult, complex, fascinating, and addictive games ever made for the NES . . .the game is slowly paced and would be devastatingly tedious for many people used to the slam-bang action of the typical NES platformer . . .the Super NES sequel was nowhere near as in-depth as the NES version, which is more than a little disappointing." —Very Helpful (veryhelpful.net)

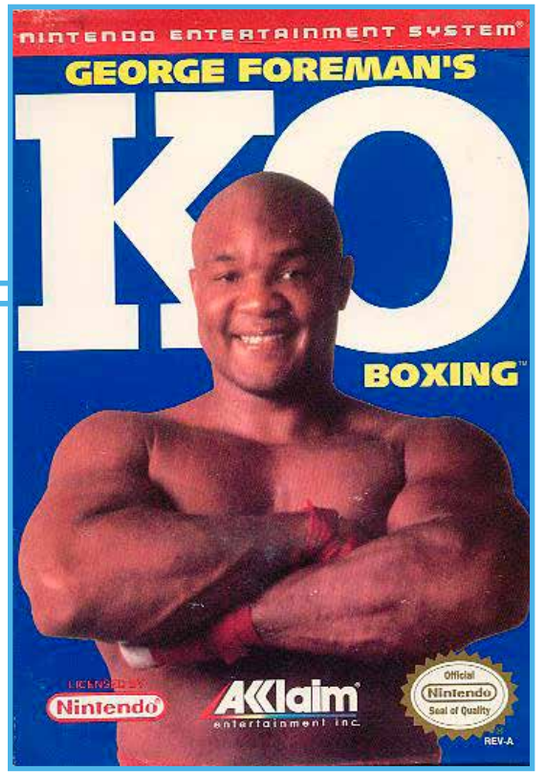
Insider Insight: Along with other Koei games, *Genghis Khan* stands out on the NES simply for its genre, as strategy gamers typically gravitate towards computers, not consoles. Nevertheless, this game somehow ended up being the cause of an all night marathon gaming session between me and a couple of friends. Keith rented it—he was always ready to take a chance on a game that seemed unusual. He got me to try it, and before long I was spending hours trying unsuccessfully to unite Mongolia in the Mongol Conquest scenario. We decided the best way to really get into the game was to do a whole scenario together. We roped our other friend Eric into joining us, ordered pizza, and spent an entire night sitting on the floor of Keith's bedroom, huddled in front of his 13-inch TV. If three teenage boys crammed into a small room sounds like a recipe for B.O. and inappropriate jokes about underage marriage (play the game and you'll see), well, it is. What would be my nightmare now was a lot of laughs back then. By sunrise we couldn't keep our eyes open any longer and we saved the game, vowing to come back and finish. We never did. I still have the desire to play through the game on my own, but more likely I'll leave it as a fun memory of my friends. —Matt Daley, co-host of the Atari 5200 Super Community podcast.

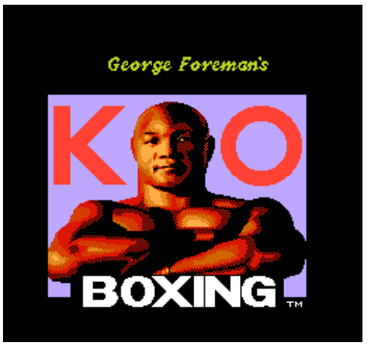
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



George Foreman's KO Boxing

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992





Step into the ring as former Heavyweight Champion in *George Foreman's KO Boxing*, which features a behind-the-boxer viewpoint similar to that of *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* Foreman, who must work his way past 12 fictional opponents in a series of three-round fights, can block, dodge left and right (there is no movement around the ring), throw left and right crosses and jabs, and execute superpunches, which are earned by performing the right combinations of successful punches. You win a bout by knocking your opponent down (if he doesn't get up before the count of 10), knocking your opponent down three times in one round, or the judge ruling in your favor when the fight is over. To help George recover from a knockdown you must press A or B in rapid succession. In this version of the game damage is tracked by simple meters, but in the Genesis and Super Nintendo renditions, damage is shown via swelling, bruising and blood on a pair of portraits positioned on the lower corners of the screen.

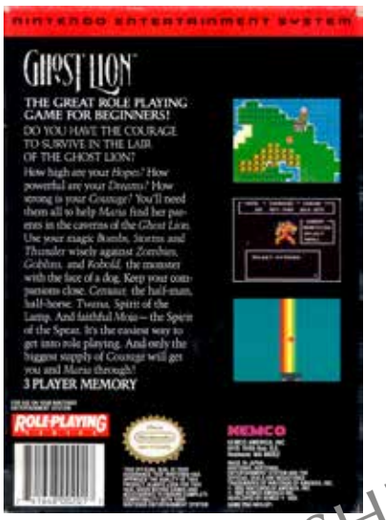
OSCHIFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"It looks and plays almost identical to *Punch-Out!!* Except it looks and plays worse. I find it difficult to rate a game like this without just telling you to play the much better alternative . . . I guess George is pretty cool. He is certainly a better role model than Mike Tyson." —Agree or Die (agreeordie.com)

Notable Quotable:
"A direct rip-off of *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, from the behind-the-shoulder presentation, to the controls, to the utter failure of concept . . . *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* was a pretty crappy translation of the arcade game. Since it was impossible to make the transparent wire frame guy of the arcade in the home version they made the main character a ridiculous midget who has to comically leap up to punch the opponent. Even as a kid I thought that was stupid. With this game they copy the same view, but we can't make Foreman two feet tall. Thus, we end up getting the same problem that *Punch-Out!!* had to resort to dwarfism to avoid—that one can't see the opponent clear enough to tell what's happening. The guy telegraphs his moves in advance as he should, but your own body covers his too much for you to be able to dodge or react in time . . . Above average graphics, large characters, decent animation, and use of color. Backgrounds are not much to look at . . .peppy music. No voice or digitized sounds to speak of." —Ultimate Console Database (ultimateconsoledatabase.com)

Ghost Lion (Legend of the)

PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Kemco
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1992


NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
GHOST LION
THE GREAT ROLE PLAYING GAME FOR BEGINNERS!
DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO SURVIVE IN THE LAIR OF THE GHOST LION?
3 PLAYER MEMORY
ROLE-PLAYING
KEMCO

To find her parents and unravel the mystery of the fierce, village-haunting Ghost Lion, Maria must journey through forests, pyramids, and other overhead areas, braving such vicious creatures as skeletons, zombies, goblins, and dog-faced monsters. When an enemy attacks, players can run or engage in a static, close-up, turn-based battle in which the gamer selects magic fighting tools or calls upon a spirit. Forms of magic you can use include needles, bombs, darkness, flames, storms, thunder, protective barriers, and more. Throughout the adventure, Maria will gather fragments of hope for increasing her courage (energy) and dreams (which let her call upon the aforementioned spirits). Maria will also collect rubies, which are used for purchasing keys, bread, a sword, and other useful items. The box claims that *Ghost Lion* (called "Legend of the Ghost Lion" on the title screen) is a "great role-playing game for beginners" while the manual recommends that players draw their own maps.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

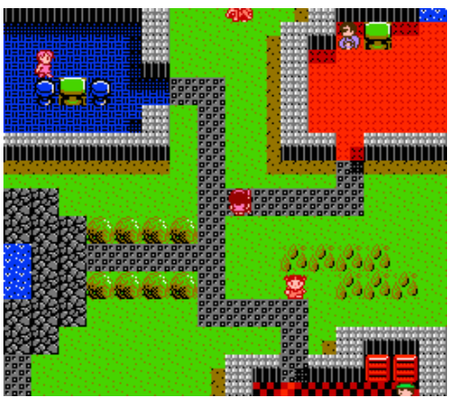
"*Ghost Lion*'s a good test for young adventurers. Weak music, nondescript graphics, and repetitive combat need improvement. However, Maria's likable band of spiritual companions lend magic to this tale." —*GamePro* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The ability to summon spirits is neat, but the game's bland art style and repetitive nature fail to amount to anything worth mentioning. If it weren't for the chick who looks like a dude on the cover, *Legend of the Ghost Lion* would be lost to obscurity forever." —*Game Informer* (November 2008)

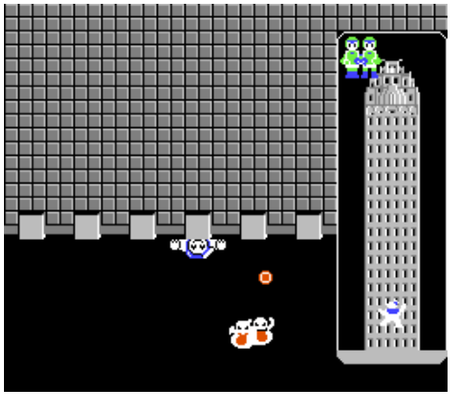
Notable Quotable:

"Bogged down by a number of poor design choices, unimpressive graphics, and even less impressive music. There are some redeeming qualities that keep this game from being a complete failure, however. *Ghost Lion*'s leveling system is unorthodox and was perhaps one of the best incentives to explore I've seen placed in a game. Plus, the premise in and of itself was interesting. Too bad the developers failed to capitalize on this game's strengths." —RetroMaggedon (retromaggedon.com)



Ghostbusters

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Bits Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



Based on the 1984 computer game, *Ghostbusters* is hampered by boring maze scenarios (guide the Ghostbusters icon around a map, enter flashing buildings), redundant driving sequences (drive up the screen, dodge enemy vehicles, suck up ghosts), mundane ghost-busting action (stand under ghosts, trap them in streams), and tough stair-climbing levels (climb 22 floors, avoid ghosts). The game gives players $10,000 for starting their own Ghostbusters franchise, but even fans of the popular horror/comedy film from 1984 may want to reconsider. Busting ghosts nets extra money, which players can use to purchase the following strategic items: a ghost vacuum, a sound generator, a capture beam, a hyper beam, ghost food, an anti-ghost suit, a capture trap, and a super trap. Compare this to the superior (though equally convoluted) Master System version, which has 15 items, including a laser confinement system for keeping ghost traps perpetually empty and a marshmallow sensor for detecting the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. In both versions of the game Ray Parker's familiar theme song plays constantly.

Notable Quotable:

"I don't see the point. Most of the game is busywork, as you meander around collecting ghosts, earning bucks, emptying your traps, schlepping to the shop . . .the bulk of the game is drudgery city." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

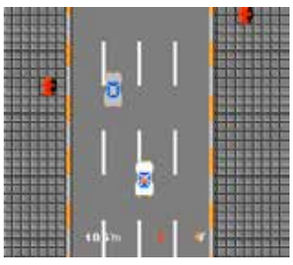
Notable Quotable:

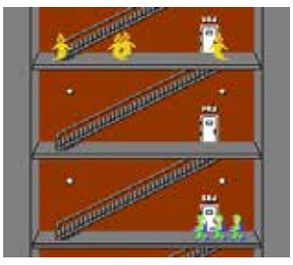
"Trapping the ghosts doesn't require much skill at all, and it completely depends on where the ghosts decide to go. You can only reach them at certain points. Driving is frustrating, since traveling at high speeds requires you to be at the top of the screen, making it impossible to avoid oncoming traffic. The final stair climb is absolutely impossible without the proper equipment, and even then the challenge level is far too high . . .the ability to purchase different vehicles has been cut . . . Most computer renditions included this feature, which allowed for a larger inventory stock. Simple, unidentifiable sprites comprise the trapping section, and the car is nothing more than a white blob with a logo on top. The most impressive graphic is the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man at the end of the game, but most players will never be able to see it." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: Elsewhere in this tome I wrote about my next door neighbor Martin and I each buying *Double Dragon* for our respective consoles and then comparing them: Atari 2600 for me and NES for him. With *Ghostbusters* we had a similar comparison, only this time I owned the game first, with Martin buying the NES port after that. Activision's Atari 2600 version was very closely based on the original home computer game and only left out a few insignificant features. In fact, it remains one of the most technically impressive games on the console. So with that in mind you'd expect this NES port to be basically the same game with a number of enhancements, right? Well, you'd mostly be right, the only problem being that a lot of the enhancements didn't really work out.

First, the Japanese programmers greatly increased the already lengthy driving sections, which was a big mistake. It was an even bigger mistake to add a fuel gauge to the car, so if you run out you have to get out and push, making it longer still! Then they chose to add two totally new sections that replaced the original battle against the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. In the first part of this you must enter the Zuul building and try to climb the stairs while avoiding the ghosts. Unlike the similar Master System port you can't use your proton packs to fend off the spooks, making this part infuriatingly hard and frustrating. The final battle against Gozer is a little more forgiving and a nice addition to the game. After comparing them, we unanimously decided that the Atari 2600 version was superior. That's not to say we didn't get some fun out of NES *Ghostbusters*—we just got far more frustration! —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

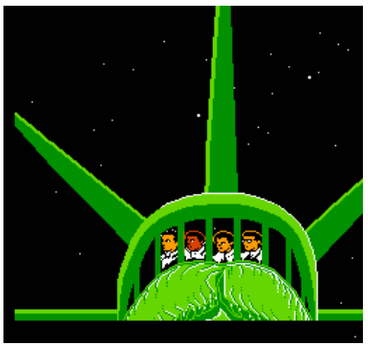




Ghostbusters II

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Side-Scrolling Shooter/Slide-and-Shoot, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Ghostbusters II, which is based on the 1989 horror/comedy film, takes place five years after the original *Ghostbusters*. It drops the needless complexity of the first game, making for a more enjoyable (if still difficult) experience. The action is divided into three types of gameplay spread over seven areas. Tunnel of Slime, Order in the Court, Subway Slime, and Storming the Museum have players running, jumping, firing a slime blower at ghosts, and setting traps for ghosts. In the *Moon Patrol*-like Hitting the Road and Ghosts in the Park, players drive down a side-scrolling street, firing at ghosts and dodging or jumping over manholes and other obstacles. The Statue of Liberty Strikes Back is a side-scroller in which players guide Lady Liberty as she walks along the harbor and the streets of Manhattan, firing her torch upward at swarming ghosts.



Notable Quotable:
"The game is divided into a number of sub-sections with plenty of ectoplasmic excitement. Unfortunately, although a good laugh, this game has awful graphics, average sound, and isn't exactly a steal at the price. Avoid." —*Computer and Video Games* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"None of the games within a game are great, but most of them are nicely done and follow the movie. The scrolling graphics are detailed enough and colorful, but there's never enough in the way of enemies to contend with . . .the action is okay, but frustrating at times . . .little character detail." —*Electronic Games Magazine* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"I didn't think that this was all that bad . . .It's pretty challenging, and is enjoyable in a frustrating sort of way . . .there's plenty of variety so that you won't get bored quickly. However, I must admit that if I was forking out my hard-earned cash for it, I'd expect better visual and aural presentation. The graphics are feeble, with blocky, poorly animated sprites and naff backdrops, and the sound is very average. A shame really, when you consider that *Ghostbusters II* is actually fun to play. Take a look by all means—but don't expect to be bowled over." —*Mean Machines* (February 1991)

Insider Insight: A lot of us old timers talk about how we would only get a handful of games each year, so if we ended up with something bad, we'd most likely play that puppy until we mastered it. After all, your mom was just as likely to grab *Anticipation* as she was to pick up *Mega Man 2*.

Ghostbusters II was that game for me. I loved the movie (don't listen to the haters) and jumped at the chance to kick some Carpathian butt with my four favorite busters on the NES. After spending my hard-earned paper route money I tore open that pretty blue box and was immediately disappointed. But there was no way to return my purchase, and I wasn't getting another new game anytime soon, so I proceeded to master weaving the Ecto-1 through the obstacle laden streets of New York City. I learned the position and movement of every inanimate object that served as obstacles in the side-scrolling bits. I would hum along to the short loop of "Higher and Higher" as I tromped through the ocean as the Statue of Liberty. *Ghostbusters II* was a terrible game, but it sure provided me with some great memories.—Greg Sewart, former *EGM* Previews Editor, Producer of Generation 16, Host of Player One Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ghosts 'n Goblins

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Micronics
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986

A great-looking and -sounding game, *Ghosts 'n Goblins* begins with a dramatic introductory scene in which a winged demon, the Red Devil swoops down and kidnaps the beautiful Princess from her lover, the brave Knight, who dons his armor and is ready to get her back at all costs. Armed with an unlimited supply of javelins, which fire straight to the right and left, you as the Knight can run, climb ladders, hop on moving platforms and over enemy projectiles, duck, and throw said javelins in rapid-fire succession. Throughout each of the game's seven brief, but brutal levels (graveyard and forest, town, caves, bridge, castle lower level, castle upper level, final boss) there are jars hiding five different types of projectile weapons: javelins, torches, swords (which are similar to javelins, but faster), axes, and crosses (which fly straight). When the Knight picks up a weapon he forfeits the one he was holding, and he keeps the new weapon even after he dies. Enemies include zombies rising from the ground, ravens standing on tombstones and then flying toward you, green monsters that fire projectiles from their mouths, forest ghosts that fly and throw spears, and flying knights that move up and down and are protected by shields. There are also bosses, including Satan himself. Amusingly, when the Knight is wearing standard armor and gets hit he's reduced down to his boxers (another hit will kill him unless he finds replacement armor first). When the Magician casts his spell on the Knight he becomes a frog. Filled with humor, horror, and harrowing action, *Ghosts 'n Goblins* is notoriously difficult, but it's a favorite among many hardcore NES fans and a nice port of Capcom's 1985 arcade game.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

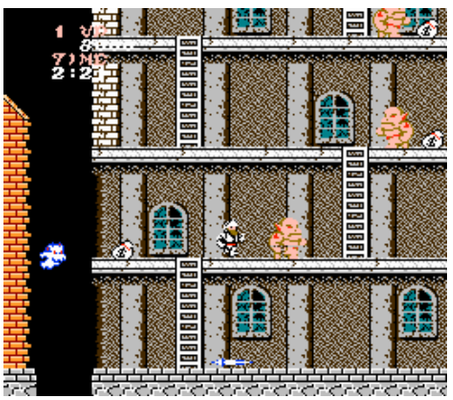
"As addicting and challenging as the coin-op . . . The graphics are detailed and colorful, the scrolling is very smooth, and the gameplay wonderfully addictive. A game that's going to keep you playing well into the (k)night time." —*Zero* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"The designers have done a superb job bringing this home version to the Nintendo system . . .very fast moving and challenging for even the most skilled of players, full of surprises, bonuses, and hidden features . . . Music and graphics are superb, with all the pictorial detail you could hope for . . .a very slight amount of flicker in some of the figures . . .a terrific game with enough depth and variety to keep you playing and discovering its surprises for a very long time." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"'Playability comes first' seems to be the motto with Nintendo games, and *Ghosts 'n Goblins* is no exception. The backgrounds are well-detailed and spooky enough to give you the creeps. The sprites lack significant detail but have a generally cute look to them . . .fairly accurate representation of the coin-op, each level gaining more and more detail, leading up to a fiery and wonderfully powerful climax . . .atmospheric music. One small gripe: does the map screen have to appear and scroll along EVERY time you die?" – *The Games Machine* (June 1989)



Insider Insight: I work with a bunch of younger gamers—mostly between the ages of 21 and 27—and most of them tell me *Dark Souls* is the hardest video game of all time. This is where I laugh and say, "Clearly none of you have ever played *Ghosts 'n Goblins* on the NES." Usually I get blank stares, and it shows my age a bit, but I swear by the difficulty of the game. Now that the Switch has offered it with their online service I tell them to give it a shot. Those brave souls that have attempted it failed miserably and told me how right I was.

As a kid I would walk to my neighbor's house up the road and attempt this brutally hard game. We would spend hours and hours just trying to get past the first level. It was insane. We'd pass the controller around frequently because we would die so quickly. Two hits and that's it—you are done and off to the next player. To this day this is the most difficult game I've ever played, and I just scoff at the mention of *Dark Souls* or anything else. —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

Insider Insight: I distinctly recall buying *Ghosts 'n Goblins* from a schoolyard acquaintance who was looking to unload it so he could buy a different NES game. This is how many middle school-aged kids could afford to buy new games by selling off the ones they had grown tired of. At this point in early 1988, I only had three games in my collection: *Super Mario Bros.*, *Tennis*, and *Ice Climber*. I wanted a new cartridge badly, and even though *Ghosts 'n Goblins* wasn't at the top of my wish list, I was willing to spend some of my paper route money to have his copy, just to get something new. Anything really. I remember playing *Ghosts 'n Goblins* here and there in the arcades and recall it being extremely difficult, but I was hopeful that the NES port would be a tad more forgiving. My hopes were dashed almost immediately when Knight Arthur first got his armor knocked off of him by a zombie and then a swooping bird turned him into a pile of bones within seconds of my picking up the controller. Sadly, while I have plenty of nostalgia for this game, most of it is shrouded in frustration and disappointment. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ghoul School

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

As Spike, you wander through his spooky school, warding off bats, skeletons, giant eyeball monsters, the Frankenstein monster, the Grim Reaper, Medusa's head, and other creepy (if cartoonish) creatures. The school is a large and confusing side-view maze of rooms connected by hallways and staircases that look alike, causing needless confusion (it doesn't help that climbing certain stairways "transports" you to seemingly random locations). Armed with such weapons as a baseball bat, a sickle, embalming fluid, a towel (snap!), and a gun, Spike can acquire spring shoes for higher leaps and suction cups for walking on ceilings, and he can enter lockers to avoid enemies. Obstacles include crates, pointers (similar to spikes), skulls, and rooftop vents. There are plenty of weapons to wield, items to use, and obstacles to avoid, but the combat is tepid, and exploring the school is tedious thanks to dead ends and far too many classrooms that contain nothing more than a single monster to fight. These factors suck the life out of what could have been a cool, campy game.

Notable Quotable:
"The exploration oriented gameplay doesn't offer much excitement, but Spike starts with four lives and plenty of energy, a rarity in an NES game. Spike himself is the worst looking part of the game, with stilted animation and an overall goofy look. The monsters' designs are creative, leading to humorous scenes like a giant eyeball creature lifting weights in the gym." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

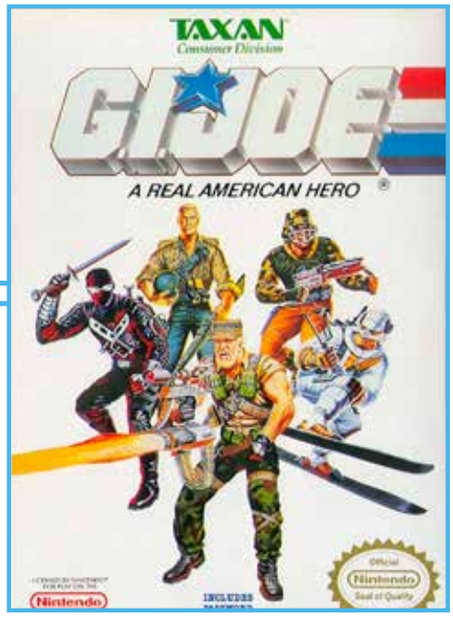
Notable Quotable:
"The non-linear design is meant to open up as you find certain items that can overcome roadblocks, but going through tons of identical hallways in the hopes you bumbled into the right one isn't a very interesting approach to exploration . . . *Ghoul School* is technically an action platformer, in that you are capable of jumping during the action, but very rarely is it trying to test your jumping skill . . . Fights with monsters are almost always a chore, since they always seem to be designed to be one step ahead of the player." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Notable Quotable:
"I was 'the creator,' with all that implies, although a few parts were done by others [including Garry Kitchen of Activision fame]. The idea came to me when the Game Boy first appeared. I thought that kids would be playing it surreptitiously in school, so I came up with the idea of a game about school. The *Zelda* NES games were really big then, so I took the gameplay model from *Zelda II* and adapted it to a *Ghostbusters* storyline. I really wanted it to become a 'property' that could be picked up by Hollywood and made into a Saturday morning cartoon . . . The producers didn't believe in testing the game with actual children, which I think would have revealed the game's weaknesses and allowed us to improve it tremendously. We would have learned, for example, that the maze was too difficult and boring. I'd also wished I'd made the play control more cartoonish and less realistic. The Mario games let you change directions in mid-air, which violates the laws of physics but is more fun. I'd mistakenly assumed that correct physics would be good, but players just found it annoying." —Scott Marshall (via www.bogleech.com), lead programmer on *Ghoul School*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero

PUBLISHER: Taxan
DEVELOPER: KID
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/ Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



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NEW GAME
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The evil Cobra organization has been terrorizing the world for decades, and it is up to the G.I. Joe team to bring down this group of thugs. Each member of the team is equipped with different weaponry: Duke (ring laser rifle, front punch); Blizzard (flame ball, dagger); Snake Eyes (j[illegible] power, katana sword); Captain Grid-I[illegible] grenade launcher, front punch); and Rock & Roll (spread machine gun, front punch). Duke is the leader of the mission, and players can select two others to be on their team. In addition to running, jumping, and battling bad guys through maze-like jungles, players must place bombs at pre-determined locations and then find the exit. Ammo is limited, so players should conserve accordingly. At certain points in the game players will commandeer the following Cobra vehicles: Pogo (moves slowly, jumps high); Interrogator (a one-man copter); and Buzz Boar (clings to ceilings and walls). In the final stage gamers control a jetpack-wearing General Hawk.

Notable Quotable:

"Combat-wise this game is inconsistent, with very difficult areas and very easy areas—it's not up to par with some of the challenging combat carts currently on the market. However, figuring out which members of the team to use in which situation is fun, and the maze-like Mission Zones combined with the standard run-and-gun scenes make for an entertaining mix." —*GamePro* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"This long-awaited game combines good gameplay and colorful graphics into a fun, exciting action/adventure cart! The ability to switch between different heroes from the cartoon show adds a new depth to an otherwise familiar storyline . . . A good variety of adventure scenarios . . .excellent background graphics with parallax scrolling, good gameplay, and mean bosses. I like the special vehicles, but the weapons should've been more intense . . .decent music." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The Taxan team deserves much praise for their handling of the well-established G.I. Joe license. Led by Kenneth Lobb (the man who helped make the N64 worth owning with games like *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*), the developers carefully examined and took note of the characters available to them and fit them nicely to their purposes. Each Cobra troop does what he's supposed to do: Frag Vipers throw grenades, Rock Vipers repel from rocks, and Night Vipers sneak up on you with little warning. While these details will go unnoticed by most players, it gives any devotee of the G.I. Joe franchise a sense of satisfaction that grown men at a software company treated their subject with respect and professionalism." —Adam Romano (www.defunctgames.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: By the time this game was released I had lost interest in the franchise. My focus was squarely on movies and video games, so toys were "nothin' but kids stuff" to me. My younger brother was still deep into the war between Duke and Cobra Commander and absolutely demanded that he receive a copy of *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* for his birthday that year. Or was it Christmas? Or Easter?

Regardless, he wanted it and he got it. But he wasn't as much into video games as I was. He played the game for maybe a week and then forgot about it. I, on the other hand, realized that the game was developed by the same people who made *Low G Man* (KID) the previous year, as well as published by the same company (Taxan). *Low G Man* was and still is one of my favorite games on the NES, so . . .

MIND. BLOWN.

G.I. Joe was great. I love that you had multiple familiar characters to choose from, each with their own strengths, weaknesses, and signature weapons (Duke, Snake Eyes, Blizzard, Grid-Iron, Rock 'n Roll, and eventually Hawk). The levels were laid out very well, with different play styles required to complete them; you could commandeer vehicles from the toy line; lots of familiar faces showed up; and it was super fun to play. I ended up adding the game to my collection not long after completing it because my brother found it too difficult. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker, and Gamer

G.I. Joe: The Atlantis Factor

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: KID
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/ Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

G.I. Joe: The Atlantis Factor begins with you in control of General Hawk, but level progression gives gamers access to the following characters: Wet-Suit (underwater expert); Storm Shadow (ninja magic maven); Snake Eyes (martial arts master); Roadblock (totes a heavy machine gun); and Duke (small arms expert). You can select various routes through the game via a mission map, but you cannot drive Cobra vehicles. Weaponry for battling the various enemies (Overkill, Cesspool, Destro, and the like) includes a variety of punches, kicks, sword attacks, guns (machine, pulse, and laser), a battle orb (which circles the Joe), and a missile launcher. Blasting open such things as crates, walls, and hillsides reveals bonus items, including ammo, extra points, Pows (increases power of current weapon), and k-rations (partially refills health bar). The game, which features such platforming staples as dodging projectiles and leaping over gaps and on moving platforms, is the sequel to *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*. G.I. Joe games are based on Hasbro's military action figure line that began in 1964.

Notable Quotable:

"G.I. Joe—is a Real American letdown in this case. Even though the game allows you to pick your favorite muscle-bound trooper, the graphics and music aren't as appealing as they could be. The gameplay, however, helps compensate for some of these shortcomings." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"A superior combat game that is loaded with action and eye-popping graphics. Capcom isn't known for making easy games, and this one is no exception. If the active team member dies anywhere except during a battle with a major boss, the remaining members must relaunch the attack from the beginning of the current area. Every time you let Joe die—either through combat or by falling into a pit—you'll pay heavily for it." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"A somewhat predictable sideview shootout . . . The Cobra forces attack in repetitious patterns, but they come in waves . . . If Capcom's mission was to create a fun *Mega Man*-style action game with all the G.I. Joe 'faves' as characters, they succeeded. However, the game is not without flaws. The mini-bosses are too often clones of each other. The passwords are ridiculously complicated to copy and after a while the action becomes repetitive. Still, if you're a G.I. Joe action fan you can have a minor blast with this cart." —*GamePro* (April 1992)

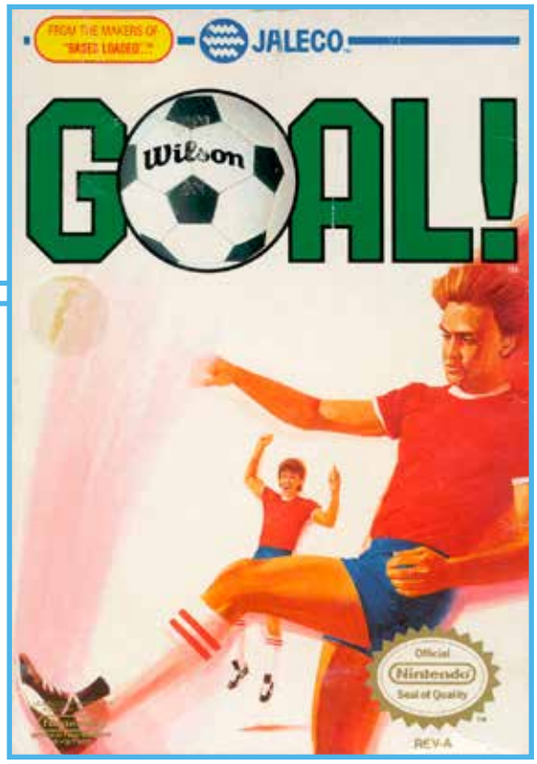
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: By 1991 G.I. Joe was nearing the end of the road. I certainly wasn't done with the franchise, as the mix of ninjas, soldiers, weird bat monsters, weird snake monsters, and Sgt. Slaughter was, and still is, awesome. When I saw the first game, *G. I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, on a store shelf, I brought it home and beat it over the weekend. And when the TV show ended I thought that was it. Sure, there were still the toys, but nothing in the media. Not until 1992 and *The Atlantis Factor*. My buddy was a bigger Joe kid than I was so he got the game first.

We made the plan in school to go home, finish our homework, and play *The Atlantis Factor* for as long as we could before doing it again until we beat it. Which didn't take all that long, unfortunately. We sat in his basement, filling up on chips and soda, and run-'n-gunned our way through each and every level. We played every path, rescued every Joe, and saved the world. I don't remember how many days it took us to do everything but it wasn't many. And that was it. The Joes were done. Thankfully we still had the shows we taped from TV and the movie to keep us in the world. We would go back and play through these games again because, for all of their flaws, they were still really fun. We traded lives or levels and made up stories about what the next game should be. We eventually moved on, but never lost the love for the franchise. —Dan Ryan, co-host of the Stone Age Gamer podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

Goal!

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



A simple "football" game that does a reasonable job of simulating the sport, *Goal!* lets players select from 16 international teams for World Cup soccer, or from eight American squads in a three-round Pro Tournament. Teams consist of 10 players (plus a goalie), each rated according to dribbling, kicking power, speed, tacking ability, shooting ratio, marking (defending a specific player), and ball-keeping ability. There's also a Shoot Competition and a VS. Mode. Realistic features of the sport abound, including hooking, slicing, back spin, extending shots, tackling, steals, headers, corner kicks, and throw-ins. The view is from a diagonal/top-down perspective and the field scrolls to follow the action.

Notable Quotable:

"*Goal!* is easy to play, but the specialized techniques of soccer may take time to master. Hook-sliding to steal the ball is especially difficult because the timing must be exact . . . The referees will usually call a violation . . . Just as in the real game, though, they won't catch everything . . . Only part of the playing field is displayed at a time, so knowing where to pass can be a problem. Also, some teams have uniforms with colors so similar that you may find yourself passing to an opponent." —*Game Players* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"After the ghastly shambolic mockery they called *Nintendo World Cup*, I thought that maybe this would be a decent soccer game. I couldn't have been more wrong . . .a dire travesty . . . The sprites are laughably awful—they don't look or move like footballers at all, and instead resemble sad phantom ice skaters slowly wobbling around a featureless green rink. The gameplay is even worse. The control method is very vague, the player logic is very poor, and the player selection is terrible, making passing plays a completely hit and miss affair. *Goal!* is one of the most dreadful console sports games around." —*Mean Machines* (September 1991)

Insider Insight: My older sister was really into soccer. Aggressively into soccer. She also enjoyed video games, and we played them together. When we were really young, only once did those two hobbies meet: *Pele's Soccer* for Atari 2600. It was years before another soccer game graced our household, and that game was *Goal!* for NES. I remember her convincing my parents to get it for her because "it's the game real soccer players play!" I have no idea where she got that from, but it worked, because she got the game, and the two of us played the heck out of it. Well, when she let me play, that is. Most of the time she just whooped me in the game until I got bored because she was way better at it than I was. It's a solid soccer game, though, and still fun to play today. The music is really good, too! —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

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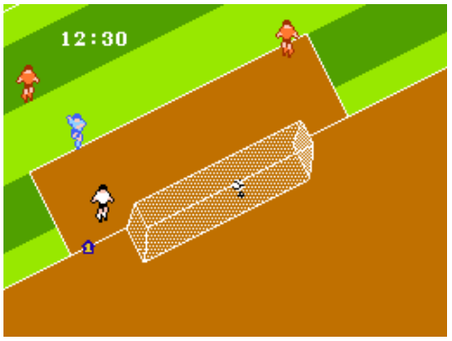
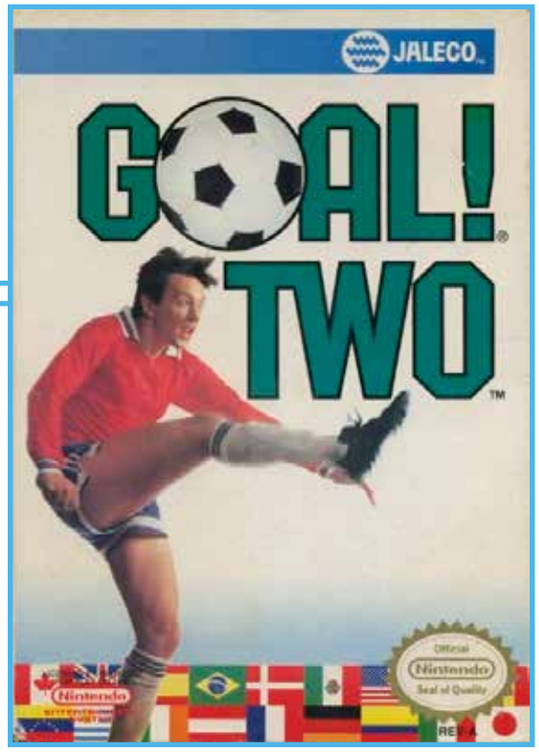


Goal! Two

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



Goal! Two is the sequel to *Goal!*, but the game is much harder to find, especially complete in the box. It looks similar to its progenitor (the diagonal/top-down perspective returns), but the on-field players appear bigger. There are now 24 international teams, but the American city teams and the Shoot Competition have been removed. There are still plenty of options, as the game lets players select 11 players from a squad of 15, adjust the length of halves between 1 and 45 minutes, change field formations (4–3–3, 4–4–2, or 3–5–2), select from two types of control (upward-diagonal or standard directional), and turn auto-goalie, fouls, and offsides on or off. You can turn the music on or off as well. Modes of play include 1P vs Com, 2P vs Com, 1P vs 2P, and Super Cup (similar to World Cup), which features six groups of four teams playing three games against one another. Then the top 16 teams compete in a single elimination tournament.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

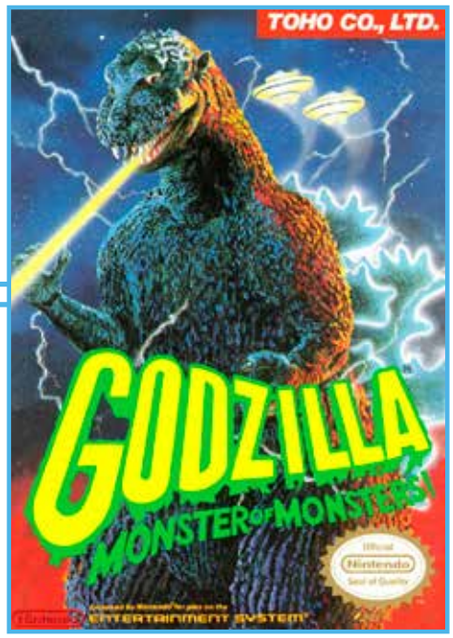
"Realistic-looking players . . .by-the-book soccer rules that further the game's realistic touch. Another realistic feature of the game that I learned the hard way is the fact that the abilities of the teams available very much mirror the abilities of the teams in real life. In other words, as tempting as it may be, do not choose America as your team. You won't get very far—at least not until you're very used to the game . . . The after-goal celebrations are nice . . .sounds are pretty average." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Sequels are supposed to improve things in a series, not make you hate the game more. *Goal! Two* apparently didn't get the memo for this, and while they added a whole slew of features, they forgot to add that simple ingredient that would have tied the whole game together: fun . . .the game's soccer field is about two to three times larger than the one in the original. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the size of the original game's field. It was perfect! Also the game's A.I. is so hard, cheap, and blindingly fast compared to your team that it's nigh impossible to advance even to halfway across the field. Thankfully, your goalie has it going on and can block potential goals like he was protecting the mayor or something, but what's the point of blocking if that's all you're going to do?" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Godzilla: Monster of Monsters!

PUBLISHER: Toho
DEVELOPER: Compile
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



Alien invaders from Planet X are attacking Earth, which calls upon its mightiest heroes Godzilla and Mothra to battle Gigan, Mecha-Godzilla, Varan, and four other monsters in this, the first video game based on the long-running movie series that began in 1954 with *Godzilla*. There are three modes of play. The hex mode is a grid wherein you advance Godzilla and Mothra (one at a time) strategically across a hexagonal battlefield consisting of Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Pluto, Neptune, and Planet X. Once you have moved one of the monsters to a particular hexagon on the grid, you enter either the battle mode (consisting of seven types of battle stages), which pits your monster against fighter planes, flying saucers, tanks, and other machinery; or you enter hyper-fight mode, where you must fight one of the seven space monsters. Godzilla fights using kicks, radiation blasts, punches, and tail chops. Mothra is equipped with an eye beam and a poisonous powder attack. The goal is to reach enemy headquarters. If either Godzilla or Mothra dies, you can still use the remaining monster to advance to an enemy base, which warps you to the next level. In the new level, you will restart the game with both monsters intact. The only problem is the enemy monsters also get revived. Sadly, none of this is as fun as it looks or sounds.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"An interesting game that throws in some strategy between the action sequences. It is the action sequences, however, that need improvement. Godzilla and Mothra move too slowly . . .even though the characters look good, the game is average . . . Godzilla just can't fight like he did in the movies. Side-view fight scenes are too predictable . . .monster fans should enjoy the all-star cast." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:

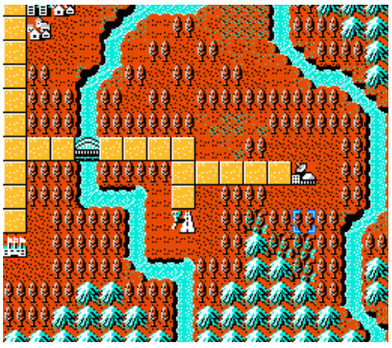
"You'll get a good sense of what it's like to be a monster; the flight controls of Mothra are especially realistic. But the giants' fighting abilities are much too tame and clumsy to appeal to fast-action fans . . . They're also huge targets, which makes it difficult for them to avoid taking a lot of hits . . . In spite of the eye-popping graphics the landscapes are all very similar. The one really glorious aspect of the game is the hex screen, which gives you a chance to use some smarts, and boosts what would otherwise be a C rating." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Insider Insight: By the time this game released in 1989, I was a full fledged fanatic for Godzilla. The local station out of Philadelphia would play an amazing collection of films on Saturday afternoons after the cartoons and wrestling had finished. Most of the time it was kung-fu. On rare occasions it was *Ultraman*. But every few weeks, instead of a second kung-fu movie, there he was. And there I was, glued to the screen. So when I saw *Godzilla: Monster of Monsters* in my local Jamesway (a store similar to Target) I had to have it.

My grandmother would do her shopping on Tuesdays, my mom always drove her, and most of the time I got a little something if I was good. Sometimes that little something was a bigger something, like an NES game. I tried desperately to make the game I was playing match the game I thought I was going to be playing and the game I begged for. *Godzilla: Monster of Monsters* is not a bad game, but it is highly repetitive. I never quite understood why the board game-style stages were necessary, as they added nothing but the same side-scrolling sections over and over again. The boss fights were much better, but ultimately frustrating, as Godzilla and Mothra were too weak and didn't feel like their movie counterparts. I was impressed by the graphics and stuck around to see everything, but only once. Ultimately, I liked the game to some degree and will always be grateful to my grandmother for indulging my love of Godzilla. —Dan Ryan, co-host of the Stone Age Gamer podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

Godzilla 2: War of the Monsters

PUBLISHER: Toho
DEVELOPER: Toho
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

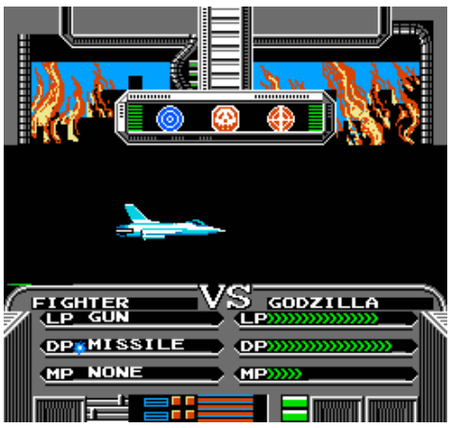


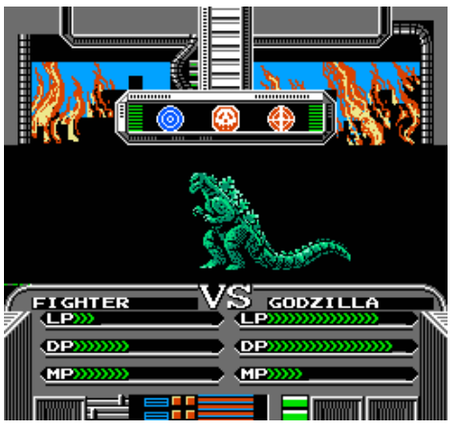
The famous monsters of Japan's Toho studios, including such stalwarts as Godzilla, Mothra, Rodan, Ghidora, Hedora, and Ba[illegible]on, are attacking the city, and players mus[illegible]and the Allied Defense Forces to stop t[illegible]gus invasion, which also includes attacks by flying saucers. The game's 12 scenarios take place via a square grid overhead city view, with players using a cursor to move fighters, tanks, missiles, freezers, trailers, radar cars, atomic bombs, destroyers, and other vehicles and weapons around the map. You should move the items (including Mothra, the only playable monster) based on the position of the monsters and the situation of the cities, such as whether they are being attacked from the air or the ground. There are six vital points on the map to pay special attention to: Army Base, Air Base, International Conference Center, Space Center, Nuclear Power Plant, and Laboratory. If a vital point is destroyed it can keep you from or result in your defeat. During battle mode the game switches to a static side-view perspective, in which players select from a list of weapons to use against the combatant monster. Whether you hit or miss the enemy depends on the random outcome of a slot machine—a flawed, frustrating, luck-based gameplay mechanic to be sure. Overall this is a decent example of the methodical, strategy-based genre, but it may seem slow and overly complicated to some (it has a 32-page instruction manual). Much harder to find than the first game.

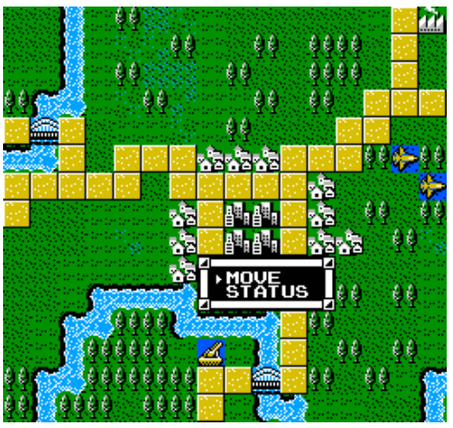
Memories: Growing up in the '70s, my brother and I were huge Godzilla fans. We loved movies like *Godzilla* (1954) and *Mothra* (1961), and we pulled for the radioactive dinosaur in *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962). We also built an Aurora Godzilla model kit that had glow-in-the-dark parts—a collaborative effort that was a lot of fun. By the time the two Godzilla games were produced for the NES my brother wasn't really into gaming anymore and he had moved out of the house, so we didn't play them together. That's probably a good thing.

Notable Quotable:

"I really tried to be open-minded, but this game blows. It's boring, and it's overcomplicated, and it's just not fun . . . It's frustrating to have such little control during the fights . . . I'd rather be playing the *Godzilla* slot [machine] app . . . When I have a teenager, I'm making her play this game as punishment for staying out past curfew . . .maybe in the earlier days of computing this would have been more impressive." —Monster Island Buddies (YouTube)



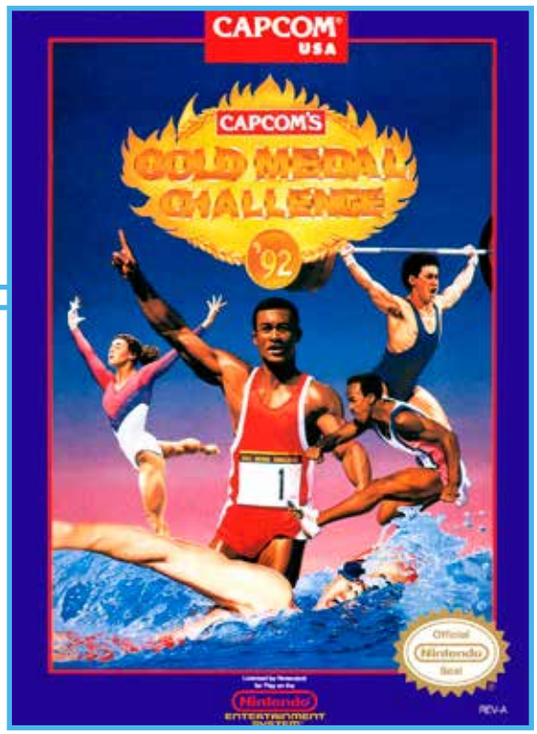


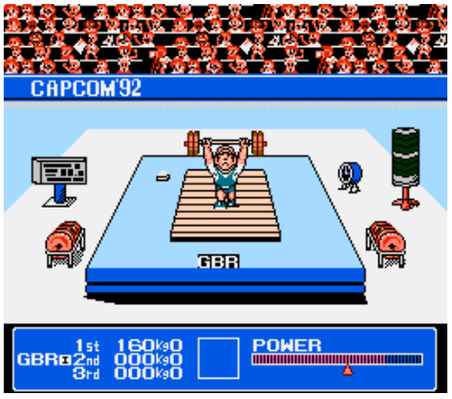


OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gold Medal Challenge '92

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Sports/Olympics, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992





A solid title for armchair Olympians, *Gold Medal Challenge '92* coincided with the real-life 1992 Barcelona summer game[illegible]. The cart features high production va[illegible]detailed stadiums, nice character graphi[illegible]al ceremonies—and an impressive 18 events: 100 Meter Dash, 100 Meter Relay, 200 Meter Dash, 400 Meter Dash, 110 Meter Hurdles, Marathon, Long Jump, Javelin Throw, Triple Jump, Shot Put, High Jump, Weightlifting, Vaulting Horse, 100 Meter Backstroke, 100 Meter Breast, 100 Meter Butterfly, 100 Meter Freestyle, and 200 Meter Medley. Fast button pressing is crucial in certain events, as you mash A and B to pick up speed and then time your pressing of the d-pad at the optimal time for jumps and throws. Subtle methods, such as pacing and rhythm, are oftentimes more important, separating the game a bit from such previous titles as *Track & Field* and *The Activision Decathlon*. Modes of play include Training and World Tournament.

Notable Quotable:

"Does an excellent job of recreating the total experience of Olympic competition . . . The most intriguing event is the marathon, which is run for the duration of the game. Players don't directly control the runners, but instead choose the speed they will run for each leg. The presentation is a treat, featuring lively stadiums, medal ceremonies, and a mix of expressive male and female competitors. This overlooked gem is definitely worth seeking out." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Kudos to Capcom for including such a wide number of events! Even though there are a lot of different variations of certain events, some of the unique events are very nice touches . . . If you have a controller like the NES Max or the NES Advantage, trust me—plug them in and use the turbo. Your poor thumbs (and your precious NES controllers) will thank you immensely in the morning . . .the contestants look like caricatures. The heads are almost bobble-like and are certainly not in proportion to the rest of their body . . . In comparison, on the NES version of *Track & Field II* the body sprites of the track runners and field players look rather muscular and much more realistic . . . if you like the looks of a cartoony looking character the graphics are good . . . I would very much recommend *Gold Medal Challenge '92* to those looking for some good old-fashioned button mashing goodness." —Retro Game Network (www.retrogamenetwork.com)

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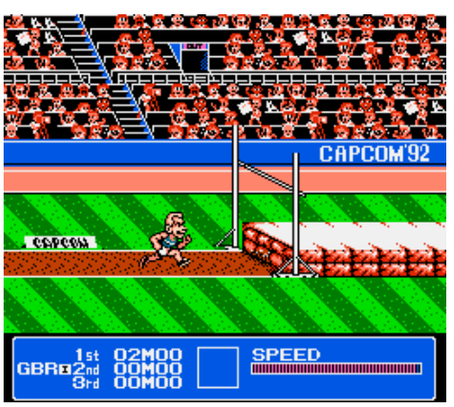


Golf

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1985

Hit the links in your living room with *Golf*, a launch title for the NES. Consisting of an 18-hole course and a horizontal swing meter, the game lets you choose your clubs, change your stance, select the angle of impact (for straight, slice, and hook shots), and control the power of your swings. If your timing is right (in accordance with the swing meter) when using a #1 wood, you can hit a 300-yard super shot. When hitting the ball, your viewpoint is from behind the player. Otherwise your perspective is from above the course. Wind conditions affect standard hits while turf conditions affect the roll of putts. Hazards along the fairways include water (rivers, ponds, and the ocean), woods, and other out-of-bounds areas. If the ball does go out of bounds you are penalized two strokes. *Golf* offers three modes of play: 1-Player Stroke Game, 2-Player Stroke Game, and 2-Player Match Game. Match games are played nine holes out and nine holes in for a total of 18 in all.

Notable Quotable:

"A thoroughly enjoyable game, even for nongolfers . . .the wind makes the game different every time, and the clubs all perform differently, as they would in real life . . .little animation, but excellent detail on the course." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"I had to fit the data for 18 holes into an extremely limited memory. That alone was a major challenge—it was an era when data compression wasn't often done, so I wracked my brain to come up with my own compression routine . . . Nintendo had planned to release a golf game on the Famicom when it was first released and they shopped the idea out to several software companies they knew, but they all declined and said they couldn't fit an 18-hole course into such a limited memory. I heard about that and, rather recklessly, said 'I'll do it!'" – *Golf* programmer Satoru Iwata (*Used Games Magazine*, 1999)

Notable Quotable:

"It would be easy to be critical of this relic of a golf game. You can only aim in 45-degree increments. All trees are out of bounds. The screen doesn't indicate the range of your club, or even the ball's proximity to the hole. But despite having to perform the distance calculations in your head, *Golf* is actually pretty fun! The swing meter is not unlike those found in modern golf games, and you can at least partially compensate for the coarse aiming controls by applying a draw or fade to your shot. Putting is tricky because the greens tend to be very fast. The overhead view of the hole is terrific, and the course is challenging and interesting in design. The game moves along at a brisk pace, allowing you to play 18 holes in just a few minutes." —Dave Mrozek (www.videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight: *Golf* is one of the more relaxing games on the NES. No manic button pushing, no enemies to fight, no getting stuck in desperation searching for that hidden item or level entrance. Just Mario, some golf clubs, and a virtual course filled with grass, trees, water, and sand. The perfect game to kick back with a cold one and enjoy. (Which, for anyone the age I was when the game came out, of course should be no stronger than root beer—gotta be a responsible parent here!)

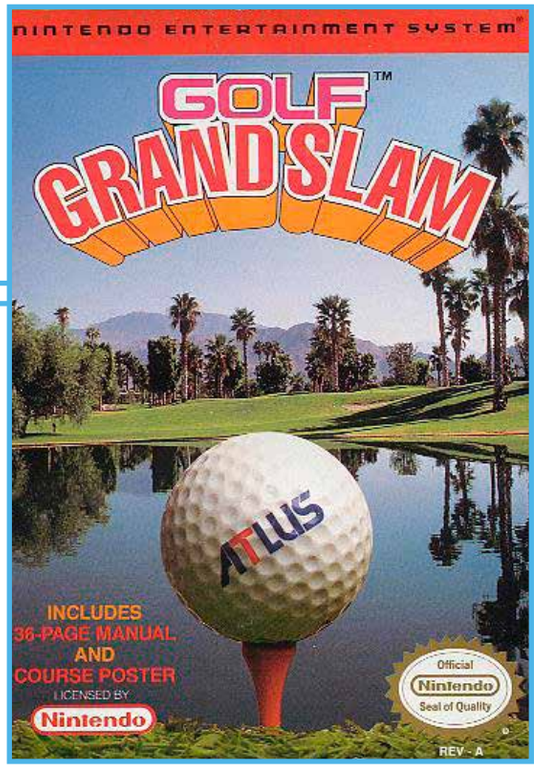
Relaxed doesn't necessarily mean free of difficulty, however, and I found *Golf*'s 18-hole course to be reasonably challenging in just the right aspects. It took plenty of practice to successfully navigate the various water hazards, sand traps, and sloped putting greens strategically placed throughout the game. The front nine naturally starts off more newbie friendly, gradually easing you into the course across a series of Par-3 and Par-4 holes where birdies can come somewhat easily. But delve deeper into the action and a Par-5-heavy back nine awaits, significantly upping the ante as you approach the finish. Until you're an experienced player expect many double bogeys or worse.

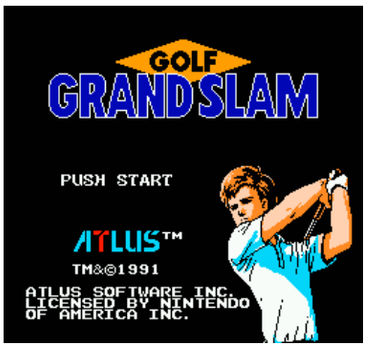
Stick with *Golf*, though, and breaking par for the course ultimately feels very rewarding. That said, the game unfortunately carries you no farther, as this single course is it. Entering your name as MARIO (which you can't even do anyway) does not unlock a hidden second quest. But the 18 holes we do have make for a fun round, and I still enjoy it on occasion to this day. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Golf Grand Slam

PUBLISHER: Atlus Software
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991





One of the more obscure, harder-to-find sports titles in the NES library, *Golf Grand Slam* is an ambitious take on the genre. The golfer is viewed from behind in a small square positioned at the bottom left side of the screen. An overhead view of the course takes up the majority of the rest of the screen, giving players a nice look at the various greens, trees, shrubs, roughs, sand traps, water hazards, fairways, slopes, and bunkers. Using a targeting cursor, a selection screen (where players choose the club, stance, grip, direction, and hitting strength), and a strike point meter (where a small dot darts from place to place on a large golf ball), skilled gamers can hit the ball into play with a good degree of accuracy. Wind speed and direction also play a factor. There are two Training modes and a Tournament mode, the latter pitting players against 30 other golfers. Despite the lack of a PGA license, this is realistic golfing at its finest on the NES.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"By 1991, NES golf had evolved from Blocky Mario Slapping at a White Square to *Golf Grand Slam*, a game seemed designed to punch you into submission with its sheer number of potential options. Whereas *Golf* required you to basically point at a ball and whack it, *Golf Grand Slam* offered a seemingly bottomless surfeit of physics choices. If you're an obsessive freak, this is your jam: You pick your clubs, then adjust your club, stance, shot, and grip, and after you've made your decision this little red dot starts flying like an electron all over your ball . . . Dear God, this is SO MUCH NINTENDO MATH. By the time I got through selecting all my options I was bored out of my mind and wanted to throw down on some *Super C*." —Jeff Vrabel (www.golfdigest.com)

Notable Quotable:

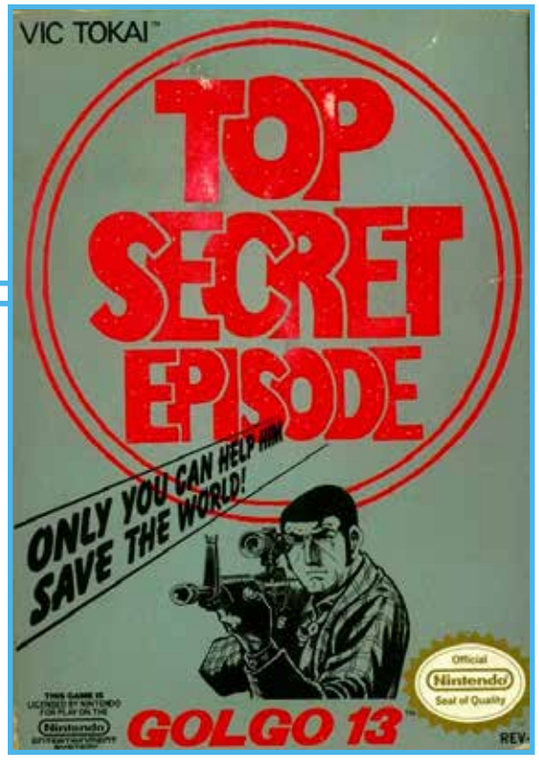
"I first encountered *Golf Grand Slam* as a teenager when my dad and I were playing a LOT of NES stuff . . . We had been playing *Golf* and *Jack Nicklaus* for some time when this came home from the rental store. It was like no golf game I had ever seen. Weird interfaces, dramatic music, and a password feature. Was this some kind of Golf RPG? It very quickly became my new favorite golf game . . .a challenging course with smart hole design and a variety of well-planned holes . . .the most comprehensive golfing experience you are going to find in a golf game of this era . . .great graphics with lots of color and detail. The soundtrack is bizarre and sounds more like it belongs in an RPG . . . Save for the frustration that comes with putting, *Golf Grand Slam* is a pretty damn good golf game." —The Electric Frankfurter (electricfrankfurter.blogspot.com)

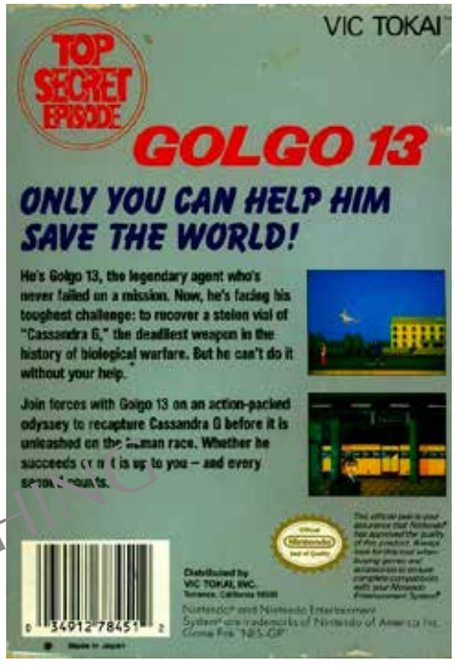
Notable Quotable:

"Despite Nintendo's attempt to destroy the sport of golf with the poorly designed, 'creatively' named *Golf*, Atlus brought it all back home with *Golf Grand Slam*…this is how video game golf should play." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Vic Tokai
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1988





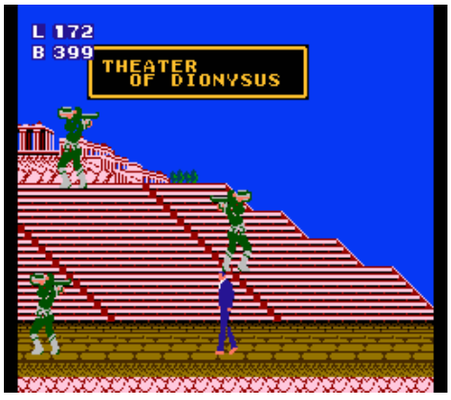
You are legendary agent Duke Toga, a.k.a. Golgo 13. Your mission is to recover a stolen vial of Cassandra G, a deadly bacteriological weapon. The action is comprised of 13 scenarios (each named after a classic film), including: first-person shootouts in a pseudo-3D maze; side-scrolling battles in the city (in which sharpshooter Duke is armed with a gun); side-scrolling shootouts in the skies (in which ace pilot Duke commandeers a helicopter); and side-scrolling shootouts under water (in which a scuba gear-wearing Duke shoots and dodges sharks, octopi, frogmen corps, and marine plants). Duke jumps ridiculously high and is rather stiffly animated, and none of the scenes taken separately would make for a particularly great game; however, it all adds up to an intriguing, surprisingly adult (it's implied that the protagonist gets laid in a hotel) adventure title with a cult following. Based on the long-running manga series, *Golgo 13* was followed by *The Mafat Conspiracy*.

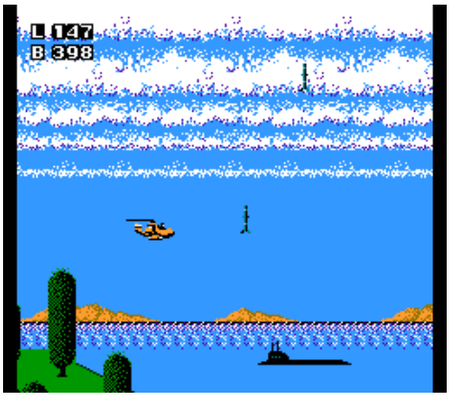
Notable Quotable:

"As feature-packed as any game available for the NES . . . Excellent sound effects (explosions, kicks, and gunfire) and music. The 'secret agent' theme song adds to the game's suspense. The graphics are impressive and show superb attention to detail. The animation is also very good . . .a big game with loads of clues to find and areas to explore. It will take strategy, careful mapping, and many hours of practice to complete the game." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"We can't understand why Vic Tokai originally bothered to release a licensed game based on an unknown character. Or how people like us convinced our parents to buy a game with a contract killer as the protagonist . . . After a while, for us at least, you start to get used to the controls for all the different segments and start to get into it; the weird sprites start to look very much like a stylistic choice; and, should you manage to finish the first whole level (by making a map on graph paper for the first-person maze, no doubt), you might start getting into the story a little. Somewhere along the way, you may realize that *Golgo 13* is incredibly cool despite its faults." —JC Fletcher (www.engadget.com)





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Goonies II

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1987

The sequel to *The Goonies*, which was only released in the arcades and on the Japanese Famicom, *The Goonies II*, like its progenitor, is based on *The Goonies* feature film, which hit theaters in 1985. Players, as Mikey, must journey through the Fratelli mansion (including an ice cavern and an underground sea) using such weapons as a slingshot, a yo-yo, bombs, boomerangs, and an underwater gun to ward off spiders, penguins, sharks, and other creatures. The mission is to find fellow Goonies, including Annie the Mermaid. There's lots of platforming action, plus some first-person, pseudo-3D areas where players talk to characters and search for clues, keys, a waterproof coat, a helmet, a hammer, a magic locator device, and other helpful items. Includes a nice rendition of the movie theme song.

Notable Quotable:

"While the first game was an arcade platformer directly inspired by the movie, *The Goonies II* did its own thing. Hampered somewhat by obtuse point-and-click adventure elements reminiscent of *Shadowgate* that threw many people off, *The Goonies II* still offered a sprawling mansion and its subterranean environs to explore via traditional platforming. It's all a bit confusing, but with little perseverance and a lot of hitting walls with your hammer you'll discover a unique hybrid adventure game worthy of the *Goonies* license. —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *The Goonies II* #75 on a list of 100 best NES games

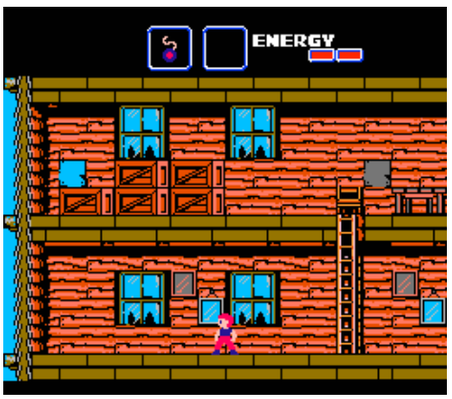
Notable Quotable:

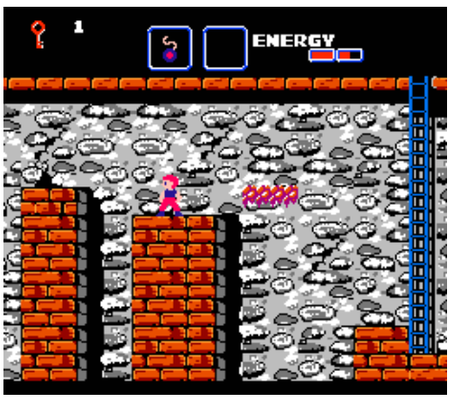
"Unlike many other NES games, this one doesn't have too much slowdown or flickering . . . There are many different environments to play through, each one with a distinct and unique look . . . Equally appealing is the soundtrack . . . *The Goonies II* is a big game and one that you'll likely not beat in a single sitting . . . Although clearly aimed at kids, this one is a bit on the difficult side. There are some pretty tough jumping challenges, and the whole adventure scene parts take a bit of thinking to figure out . . . The game lives up to the movie's premise and delivers a fun-filled adventure from start to finish." —Craig Majaski (nintendotimes.com)

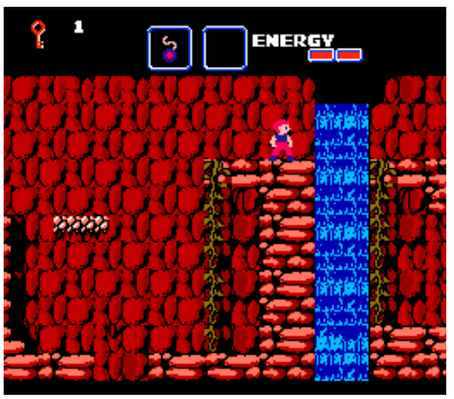
Insider Insight: "WHOA, THERE'S A SEQUEL TO GOONIES! I WONDER WHEN THE MOVIE IS COMING OUT?" I suppose many kids in America thought that, or something similar, when they saw that there was a *Goonies II* game. Surely they wouldn't make such a game without a movie, right? Little did we know that this was a sequel to a *Goonies* game that only came out in Japan and a few select PlayChoice-10 coin-op cabinets. Movie or not, I still played this and really enjoyed it as a kid. Granted, it was super cryptic, and I had very little idea of where I needed to go and what all I needed to do, as I only borrowed the game from my friend Chris and didn't really look at the manual much.

When I became a teenager, I finally understood the mechanics of the point-and-click parts much better, as well as the fact that there's a second page of the tool menu. Once I figured that out I was finally able to beat it. This was a highly ambitious game for its time, being an early example of what we now call "Metroidvania." I still fire it up from time to time to see if I'm still "Good Enough" to play through it. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

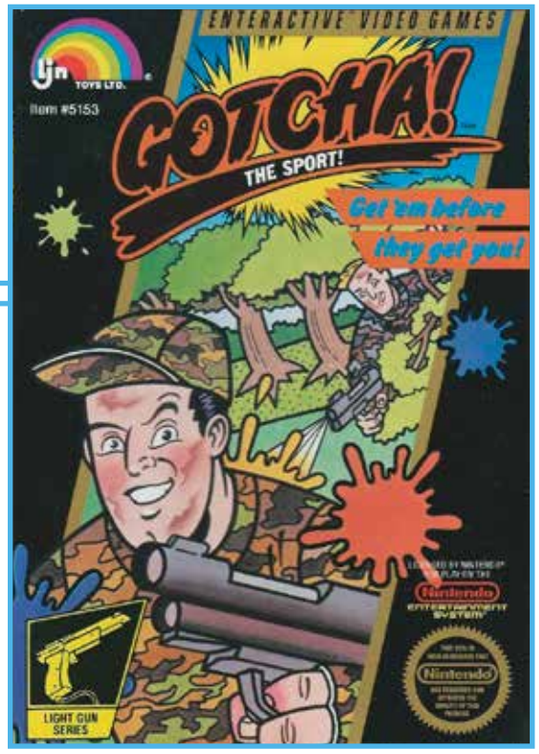






Gotcha! The Sport!

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Atlus/Sanritsu Denki
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



It's paintball for the NES! Loosely based on the 1985 feature film, *Gotcha!* is a surprisingly fun, highly original version of the recreational sport that is played like capture the flag. The control pad scrolls the action right and left while the Zapper gun is used for picking off opponents and shooting the opponents' flag. After snagging the flag, the player must return it to home base, shooting enemies and avoiding their fire along the way. Shooting smaller enemies nets more points than larger ones, and a map across the top of the screen shows the position of the flags. Three difficulty levels are available: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. There are only three stages—Forest, Bronx, and Winter—but they look terrific and they repeat with increased difficulty.

Notable Quotable:

"I'd have liked a few more features to spice things up . . . A paint grenade that, when hit, would take out all the enemies on screen would have been interesting . . .a few more areas would have helped . . . I like the music . . . It makes me think of secret agents and sets the proper mood. The only sound effect is the noise of gunshots. The scenery and characters are well designed and clearly drawn . . . It's nice to see new games that use the Zapper. It gets boring shooting ducks after a while." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

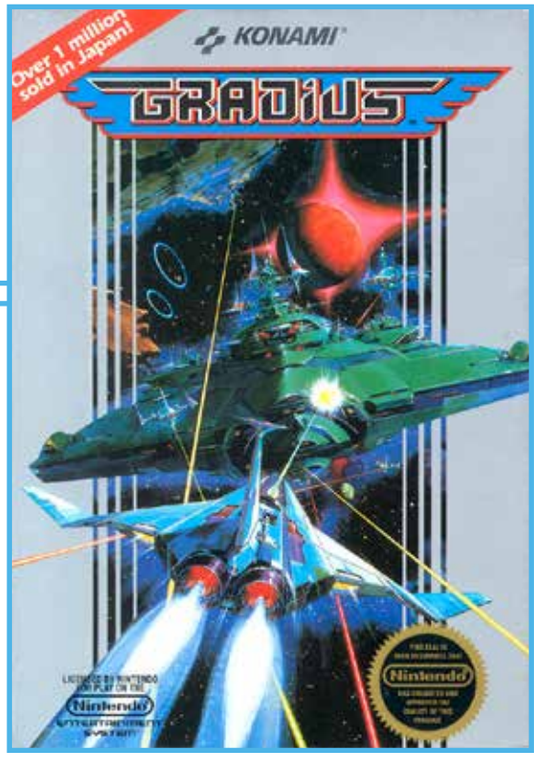
Notable Quotable:

"There is a lot more to this game than simple target practice . . . With only three stages, there isn't a lot of content . . . However, as a light gun game, it actually is fairly impressive . . . The environments were very well detailed with some nice little touches, such as the snowmen in the snowfield area. There was also a good sense of depth with multiple-size enemy sprites . . . Like the gameplay, the audio is suffering mostly from lack of content. The soundtrack is rather good for the NES, but you'll be hearing the same couple of songs for the whole game . . . I really loved playing this game . . .the sheer number of enemies kept the game exciting from start to finish." —Deadpark (www.deadpark.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gradius

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1986



One of the better side-scrolling shooters for the NES, *Gradius* is a nice port of Konami's 1985 coin-op classic. Players pilot a sleek Warp Rattler ship through six intense stages, firing lasers, double beams, and air-to-surface missiles at a variety of alien ships, robots, and amoeboid creatures. A nifty power-up system lets players grab capsules and select which powers to boost, including speed, missile, double, and laser. A force field barrier and doppelganger ship help keep the Warp Rattler safe, but it's very tough getting through all the stages, which include Volcanic, Stonehenge, Inverted Space Volcano, Moal (featuring large heads similar to the Easter Island statues), Antennoid (featuring tentacle-like antennae floating through space),

Amoeboid, and Xaerous Superfortress (which is controlled by a complex biocomputer). Pressing up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A at the title screen lets players begin with a full set of power-ups, introducing the famous Konami Code (which was popularized in *Contra*).

Notable Quotable:

"Your Warp Rattler may be the most awesome fighting ship ever let loose in the galaxy . . .challenging in the extreme—definitely not for beginners. With its endless hordes of fast and evasive enemies, *Gradius* will test your reflexes to the limits . . . If you like shooting games with fast action, this is one of the best we've seen." —*Computer Entertainer* (January 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"It'll be a warm day on Pluto before you've completely mastered the intricacies of *Gradius*. Though it isn't much of an improvement visually over old games like *Defender* and *Zaxxon*, you'll be too busy ducking and accelerating to notice. The music is slightly more atmospheric than in most games." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

Notable Quotable:

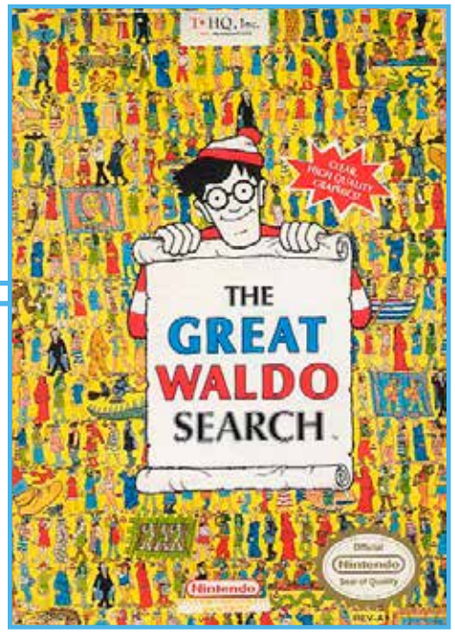
"The Vic Viper's first attack run may have been in the arcades, but the NES brought the popular space shooter home in a near-perfect port. *Gradius* is all about pimping your ride . . . *Gradius*' unique power-up system makes for some tough decisions: do you beef up your defenses to tough out that inevitable meteor shower? Or do you crank your ship's thrusters to their max, relying on a quick trigger finger to clear a path?" – IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Gradius* the 34th best NES game on a list of 100

Insider Insight: I had played a few shoot-'em-ups before I discovered *Gradius*, but I didn't love them like I loved this game. I was immediately enthralled with the world the game was giving me: enemy ships and mechs buzzing around rocky terrain. It took me a while to get past stages 1 and 2, but then seeing stage 3, with all of the Moai Heads everywhere, sealed it for me that this game was awesome. And thank God Konami gave us the Konami Code, otherwise I would never have been able to get through it as a kid. Great music and gameplay really show that this is an outstanding game for its time, along with proving that the NES could give us decent ports of arcade games. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Great Waldo Search

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Radiance Software
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle/Educational/General, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992



Based on the *Where's Waldo* (*Where's Wally* in the UK) seek-and-find picture books created by English illustrator Martin Handford, *The Great Waldo Search* has players guiding a magnifying glass around five busily illustrated (if mostly static), side-scrolling worlds searching for magic scrolls, clocks (extra time), point markers, and of course Waldo himself, who appears in a different place every time the game is played. Also hidden is Waldo's dog Woof who, when found, instigates a flying carpet bonus round in which he flies over a cityscape, collecting points. Searchable worlds include Land of the Gargantuas, Kingdom of the Carpet Flyers, Water Monks vs. Fire Druids, Enchanted Underground, and Land of the Waldos. Expert mode adds bonus challenges, while a special Parent Feature lets mom or dad turn off the clock and/or force the screen to go to the hidden objects. A funky, digitized musical intro (by Jeff Barry) belies the mundane nature of the game. Preceded by *Where's Waldo?*

Notable Quotable:

"I love the *Where's Waldo?* series of seek-and-find picture books . . . I loved them as a kid and I still think they are brilliant—colorful, imaginative, and just plain fun . . .as for the video game, it is certainly better than the original mess [the *Where's Waldo?* NES game], but still not great." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*The Great Waldo Search* could have been a mildly entertaining hide-and-seek game for kids, but the execution is lackluster, and the minimal amount of content is disgraceful. There's literally nothing to do after the first ten minutes of play, and anyone who bought this new back in 1992 was the unfortunate victim of daylight robbery!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Insider Insight: My uncle wouldn't let me put the game cartridges in his Nintendo console; he had the honor of blowing into and starting up the games. I thought he was just being a possessive teenager until my friend's little sister jammed *The Great Waldo Search* into their Nintendo and we were unable to eject it. Instead of risking breaking everything by removing it by force, we decided to play it until their dad could help.

This game became the reason I fell for every stupid magic eye and "look closely" computer jump scare of the '90s. We were all nose-to-the-screen scanning these pixelated images to find Waldo first. The five-year-old found him. Every. Single. Time. She would squeal with glee and we would groan in defeat. Luckily, we could redeem ourselves by trying to find the other items or Woof before time ran out. When their dad interrupted us in The Land of Waldos on expert he had screwdriver in hand to "save us" from the torment of the stuck cartridge. We were too engulfed in sock searching to care. We were caught in the adrenaline rush of racing the clock and trying to thwart whatever witchcraft was giving the kindergartner supervision. Their dad was puzzled when we finished the game, surrendered the console for him to eject the cartridge, and then proceeded to put it right back in to see if we could beat the kid's high score. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*

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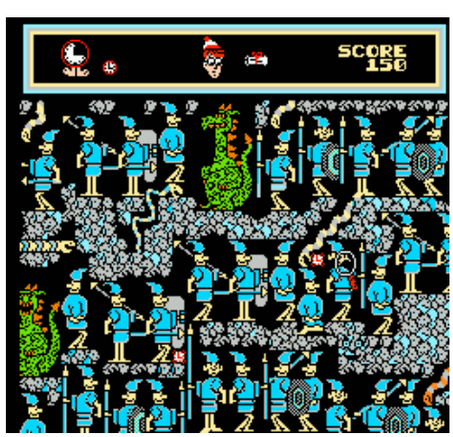
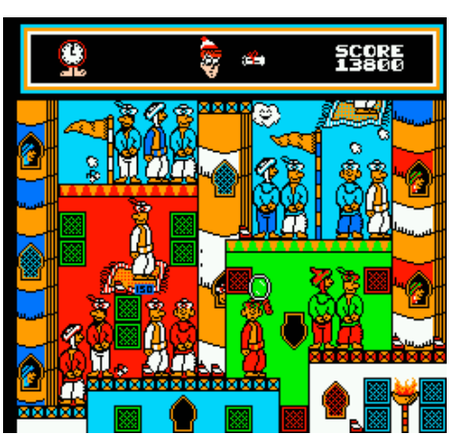
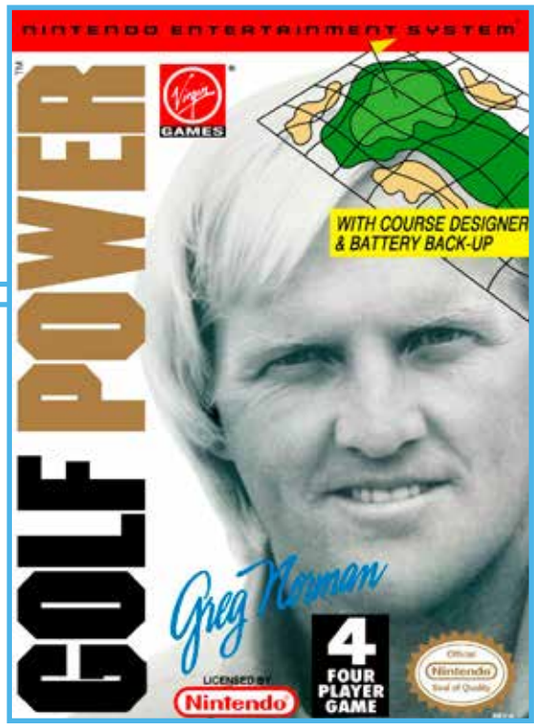




Greg Norman's Golf Power

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Graphics
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1992



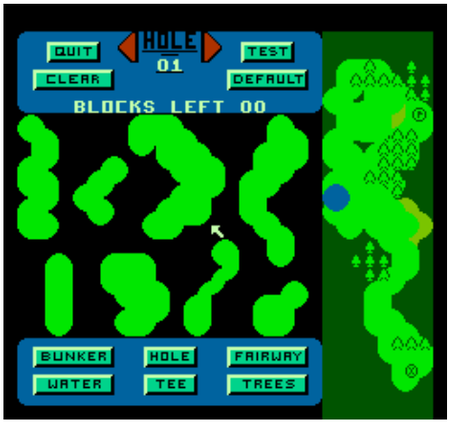
Endorsed by the Great White Shark (usually shortened to just the Shark), *Greg Norman's Golf Power* lets gamers play a pre-set course in England, Scotland, or the USA. Or they can design and save their own 18-hole dream course via battery backup. After an inexplicable load screen (a rarity for a cartridge game) in which a blinking "creating course please wait" message appears, players view the action from behind the golfer. This perspective is supplemented by an overhead view of the hole, which appears via a vertical strip along the right side of the screen. When the ball gets close to the hole a large overhead view of the green appears, with a small view of the golfer in the upper right corner. Hitting the ball involves aiming, adjusting topspin or backspin, and activating a shot meter, the last of which determines power, hooking, and slicing. Features include putting and driving ranges, club selection, three difficulty levels, changing wind and weather conditions, and three game modes: Practice, Matchplay, and Strokeplay. A very hard game to find, especially for a sports title.

Notable Quotable:

"Considering how late in the NES life cycle this was, this game could have looked a hell of a lot better . . .the sprite for Greg Norman looks pretty good . . .the mini map is one of the better-looking ones for the NES . . . It's 1992, how do you have a game without music? . . .this game does give you a lot of options . . . Just was not fun . . .the worst NES golf title. It had amazing ideas and a ton of replayability, but none that could make it fun." —Drink a Beer and Play a Game (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The feature set for *Golf Power* even puts many 16- and 32-bit golf games to shame . . .controls are simple to figure out . . . The game even looks quite good for the time if you can forgive a rather limited color palette . . . Nailing perfect accuracy on my shots never stopped being a crap shoot. While the windup for power goes at a decent speed on the meter, the swing-back for accuracy blasts through at triple speed. That especially gets infuriating when a shot has to be made at partial power . . .the game gets very inconsistent . . . The wind gauge could show thirty-mile-per-hour gusts without the ball being affected at all. Hitting the exact same spot on the accuracy gauge could either shoot normally or flub at complete random . . .gives me a headache." —Adam Wallace (www.defunctgames.com)



OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Gremlins 2: The New Batch

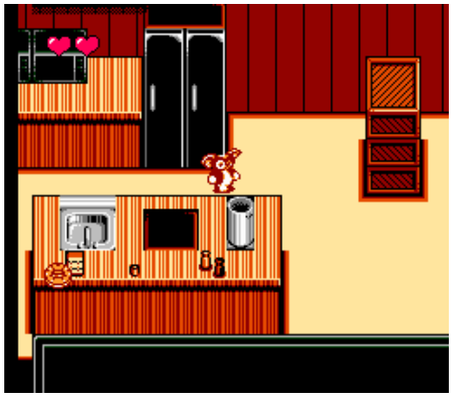
PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Loosely based on Joe Dante's 1990 feature film, *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* is a nice-looking game that gives Gizmo a surprisingly large role. Players guide the furry Mogwai around rooms in the Clamp Centre building (Billy's office, an air duct system, the control center, etc.), jumping over gaps and onto platforms, and throwing tomatoes at such enemies as bats, spiders, and Gremlins, including an electric Gremlin and machine gun-toting Mohawk Gremlin. After a time Gizmo can hurl paperclips and use a bow to fire lit matches. Gizmo can also use flashbulbs (for destroying all onscreen enemies), balloons (to float over holes), time stoppers (for briefly freezing enemies), and other items. Defeated enemies drop crystal balls that can be used as money in Mr. Wing's shop. The platforming action is unusual for an overhead view game and it makes certain jumps hard to judge, but this is a quality title.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Takes all the best parts from *Blaster Master* and *Fester's Quest* and throws in any missing elements there may have been . . .beautiful intermissions, lots to interact with, and plenty of challenge—a great game!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1990)



Insider Insight: Here they grow again! Sunsoft creates another fantastic title based on a movie. In a world full of disappointing adaptations, *Gremlins 2* stood out from the batch.

This game really pushed the system to the limit. Controlling Gizmo and keeping him safe was a blast. The controls were tight, the cinematic cut scenes were jaw-dropping, and the soundtrack was up there with the best! Am I the only one that would make my own video game soundtracks by recording the audio onto cassette tapes?

I couldn't get enough of this game. I was a huge monster kid. I met the director of *Gremlins*, Joe Dante, in 1993, but it wasn't until 2018 that I would meet the star! Our local drive-in theater was hosting a Gremlins Takeover event. *Gremlins* 1 and 2 were screening back-to-back on glorious 35 mm film on one of the largest screens in the country. The best part was Zach Galligan—aka Billy Peltzer—was scheduled to attend.

My family and I entered the concession stand and there he was, signing autographs surrounded by fans and replica Gremlins. The little monsters were posed to look like they were causing their usual mayhem: drinking beer, playing cards, and one was poking its head out of a Christmas tree. I then heard a long lost familiar 8-bit tune. There, sitting on a little table next to Zach, was a Nintendo Entertainment System with *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* playing in all its glory.

In a surreal moment of life imitating art, Zach watched the pixelated tribute of his character in the opening cutscene; as 8-bit Billy unlocked Gizmo's cage and presented a thumbs up, Zach gave a thumbs up right back. What a great example of life imitating art! —Sean Tiedeman, filmmaker, director of *King of the Arcades*

Insider Insight: My brother and I were late to the party when it came to the Nintendo Entertainment System, having not gotten one until late 1989. We seldom acquired games due to their price. So in late 1990, when my grandmother asked us if we wanted a new game, we jumped at the opportunity, but the department store we went to didn't have much of a selection. The box art for most of the games was lame, but there was one that caught our eye—*Gremlins 2: The New Batch*.

My brother and I had seen the movie over the summer and loved it, but the memories of that garbage *Gremlins* game for the Atari 2600 still stung like an open wound. We tried to find something else that would scratch our gaming itch but nothing stood out. We were disappointed that we couldn't find a *Mega Man* game or something popular like that, so we had to settle for *Gremlins 2*.

When we popped it into our NES we expected the worst, but the game was actually amazing. Our jaws dropped at the sight of the fantastic graphics, tight gameplay, catchy music, and the way the game stuck to the story laid out in the feature film. Best of all, it was extremely fun and re-playable. The top-down view, the way you'd purchase weapon upgrades, and even the enemies themselves reminded me a lot of *The Legend of Zelda*, but with light platforming added to the mix. Some of the bosses were huge! My mind was absolutely blown.

That was the day that I crumpled up my dislike of licensed games like a dirty newspaper and tossed it in the trash. From that point on I've been willing to give a game based on a film, television show, cartoon, or comic book a chance, despite how bad the source material or developer might be. Sure, there are still plenty of putrid licensed games out there, but you know what? I don't care. I'll play them. I probably already have. And *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* is the reason why. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, and filmmaker

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Guardian Legend

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software
DEVELOPER: Compile
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

A biotech world called Naju is headed on a collision course with Earth, and you must battle your way deep within the planet to destroy it. *Guardian Legend* alternates between *Zanac*-style shooter action and *Legend of Zelda*-type exploration, the latter of which features an intrepid female walking around labyrinthine corridors and dungeons, shooting aliens (with names like Eyegore and Clawbot), finding and using keys to enter rooms, and shooting blocks to reveal paths and items. A grid map helps gamers track their movement. In the rapid-fire spaceship levels, which are harder, faster paced, and more enjoyable than the adventure areas, players fly up the screen, blasting away at onslaught after onslaught of alien ships, space rocks, and other enemies. Weapons include multi-bullets, back fire, area blaster, repeller (spinning bullets), wave attack, bullet shield, enemy eraser, grenades, fireballs, and lasers (hyper, cutter, and saber).

Notable Quotable:
"For all the freshness this game brought to the scene, its overly confusing world map and outrageous password system (32 characters long!) tainted the overall experience." —*Game Informer* (March 2008)

Notable Quotable:
"This is a true space odyssey, with much to discover and many places and ways to defend yourself. And rarely has the graphic potential of the NES been used to such eye-popping advantage!" – *How to Win at Nintendo Games III* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"*Guardian Legend* is similar to *Zanac*, but is really two games in one. The maze scenes aren't hard, but they are long. The flying sequences are also easy, with all of the difficulty wrapped up into the boss confrontations. The game does do a good job of bringing the two separate game themes together." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Looks like a standard, though extremely speedy, vertically scrolling shooting game when you first start playing. It's not until you've read the instructions and played for awhile that you realize how much more there is to the game than simply flying and shooting . . .you must use your mind as well as your shooting reflexes to find and activate all the security devices to destroy Naju . . .very challenging, with good graphics and sound effects." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1989)

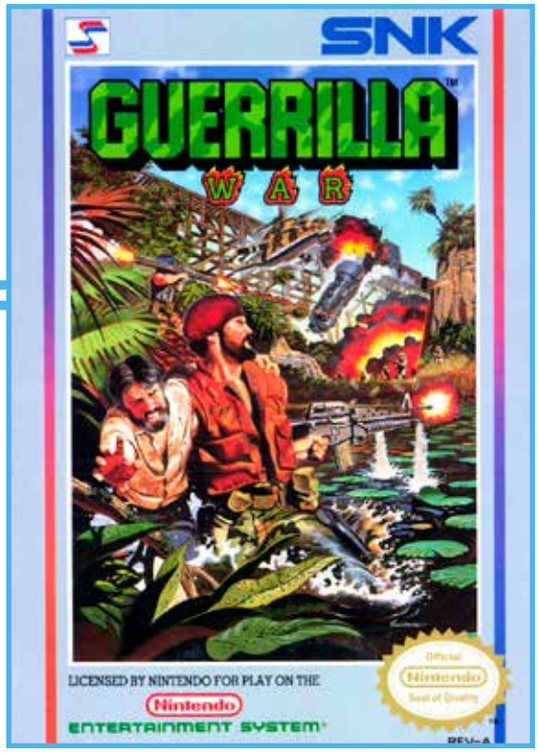
Insider Insight: We all had that friend who had a little bit more money than everyone else. The friend who always seemed to have the most expensive stuff, the newest shoes, the coolest bike. And of course the most video games. I had a friend like this, and one day, while browsing through his NES cartridges, I came across *The Guardian Legend*, a game I had never heard of. I looked at the cover, which like a lot of game covers back in the day offered no help as to what to expect. But the back of the box . . .there was no way I wasn't going to love this. I borrowed it from my friend that day and still have it. (He forgot about it, I'm sure.) I immediately fell in love with this weird little game.

What I saw on the back of the box—a mix of *Blaster Master* and *The Legend of Zelda*-style dungeon crawling, and a space shooter—was exactly what I got. And it was gorgeous, with a killer soundtrack to boot. I played the game a ton, wanting to get better and better at the shooter segments and faster and faster through the dungeons. I couldn't get enough. Even the password system—an overly complicated mess to be sure—didn't bother me, because the game itself was so good. I was amazed by the depth of the game and have gone back to it often. I find new things to love every time I play, but will never forget that first time. I'm not sure any game has blended genres as well as *The Guardian Legend*, and maybe nothing ever will. —Dan Ryan, co-host of the Stone Age Gamer podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Guerrilla War

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Run and Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



As a guerilla leader, you and your comrade must liberate a small island country from a cruel dictator. Predictably, *Guerrilla War* for the NES has less-detailed graphics than the 1987 SNK arcade semi-classic, but the gameplay is faster, making for a more intense experience. In fact, it moves at a quicker pace than most other games of its type, including *Commando*, *Ikari Warriors*, and *Rambo*. Players guide a soldier through heavily guarded villages, beaches, and other locations, shooting at enemy troops. Killing red soldiers releases fun-to-use power-up items you can grab, including flamethrowers, grenades (which destroy barriers and tanks), three-way bullets, bombs (for killing all onscreen enemies), and extra lives. As in *Front Line*, you can also commandeer tanks. There are 10 stages to battle through: Jungle, Small Farm, River, Coal Mine, Inside Coal Mine, City, Sewer, City (yes, another city), Base, and Palace. There's a mine cart bonus round as well. The arcade game boasts rotary controls but the NES d-pad works just fine. One of the best games of its genre, *Guerrilla War* has nice graphics, intense gameplay, and a good soundtrack.

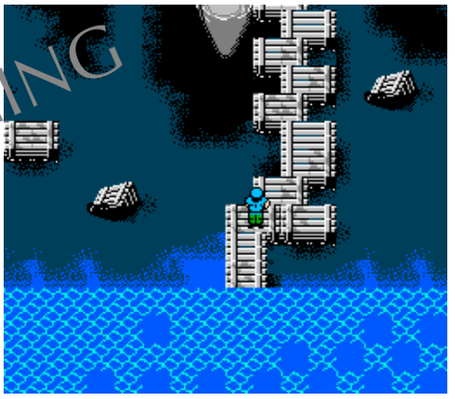
Memories: Years ago I was browsing the vendors' room at a video game convention, not really looking for anything in particular, when I stumbled across *Guerrilla War* complete in the box for just $12. It looked cool, and the vendor told me it was an excellent game—he was right. Nowadays the game goes for three to four times that price, but there's no way I would part with my copy. It is simply too much fun.

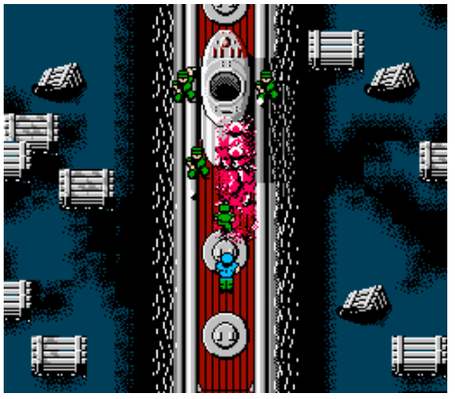
Notable Quotable:

"SNK did an admirable job of redrawing the arcade graphics for the NES. All the characters look sharp, the backgrounds look credible, and the cutscenes are beautifully drawn. The only flaw is some pretty heavy flicker when dozens of enemies, bullets, hostages, and explosions appear onscreen at once . . . The NES never sounded better . . . The game is saturated in memorable, pulse pounding tunes. I've always been amazed at the sheer number of explosions you hear throughout *Guerrilla War*." —Neo-Geo.com

Notable Quotable:

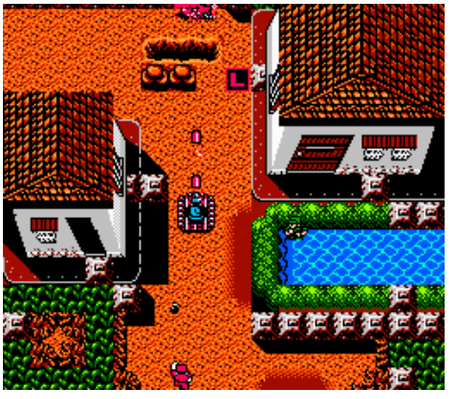
"If there's any one possible fault, it's that you have absolutely unlimited continues and can just power your way through the game without really doing any good at it. If you try to play it straight it's not a challenging game, but if you're playing to keep a tally of your score and/or how many continues you use, it becomes quite vicious and can make for a tough point trial. Whatever the case, *Guerrilla War* on the NES is one of the finest examples of an overhead run-and-gun on the system, and it helps that it was actually developed by SNK themselves instead of notorious shadow developer Micronics, infamous for some of the worst arcade-to-home conversions on the NES, including *Ikari Warriors*. While SNK still had a few years to reach mega-fame with the Neo Geo, *Guerrilla War* was one of their finer pre-nineties games." —Michael Plasket (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

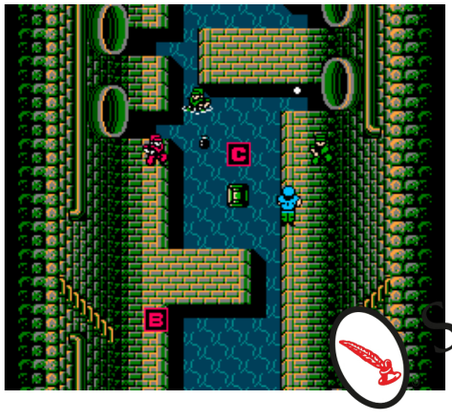




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Guerrilla War





Insider Insight: Back in the early '90s the Home Shopping Network was a phenomenon, and Mom loved buying things she'd see on their shows. She'd usually buy dolls, or music boxes, or things she thought would be useful around the house. Weekly shipments were fairly common, containing whatever she'd bought a week or two prior.

One day a nondescript box arrived. There was nothing unusual about that, and I paid it no mind until Mom called me into the kitchen, where she fished something out of the box and handed it to me. It was an NES game called *Guerrilla War*. I'd never heard of it before then, although I was familiar with some of SNK's other NES games. She chose wisely, as it ended up becoming my favorite overhead run-'n'-gun on the NES. My brother Ryan and I used to play it together from time to time, and eventually I got so good at it I was able to finish it using only a continue or two.

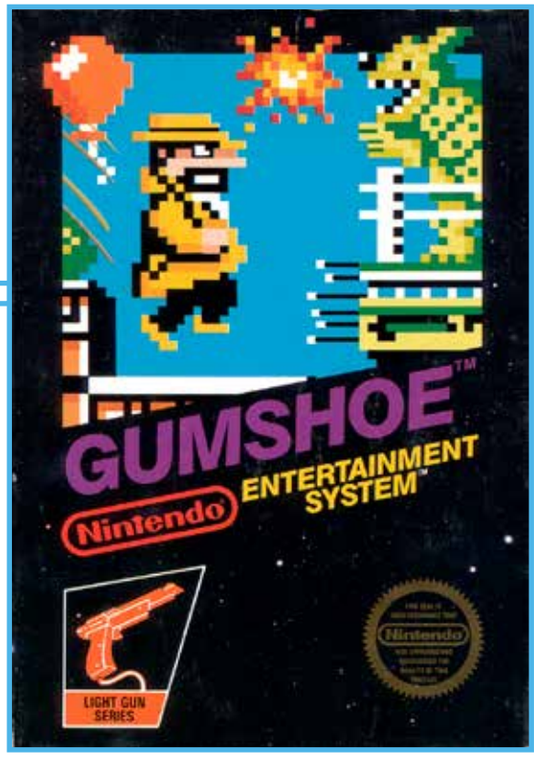
I eventually discovered that *Guerrilla War* was called "Guevara" in Japan, and was based on the Cuban Revolution that Che Guevara and Fidel Castro led against the Batista dictatorship in the 1950s. The majority of the references to that were removed when the game was released internationally, and what little was left in was mostly lost on the young audience that played the game. I know they were lost on me, although I do remember thinking that the island shown on the map looked a lot like Cuba.

Many years have passed since then. Unfortunately, I no longer have my original copy of *Guerrilla War*. I wish I did, as my mother passed away a couple years after surprising me with the game. But the memory remains. Thanks, Ma.
—Rob Strangman, author of *Memoirs of a Virtual Caveman* and co-author of *Hardcore Gaming 101 Digest Vol. 3: The Guide to Retro Horror*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gumshoe

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1986



One of the more inventive light gun shooters for the NES, *Gumshoe* finds a trench-coat-clad former FBI agent named Mr. Stevenson moving automatically to the right, oblivious to the rocks, cars, bombs, alligators, skulls, diving airplanes, angry armadillos, hungry sharks, flying booze bottles, grinning birds, and other hindrances in his path. It is up to the player, using the Zapper gun, to shoot and destroy the enemies and obstacles, and players can even shoot Mr. Stevenson himself, which makes him jump over various obstructions. Guiding him into balloons will give players more shots. The objective is to collect five Black Panther diamonds to free Stevenson's daughter, who has been kidnapped by mob boss King Dom. There are four colorful, nicely rendered levels of play: City, Sky, Sea, and Jungle.

Notable Quotable:
"I could not put this game away . . .the play is simple but very challenging . . . Graphics, sound, and presentation are slick . . . An absolute must for light gunners." —*Computer and Video Games* (February 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"We had a lot of fun with this game because it offers good graphics, excellent sound, and a wide range of situations to challenge your shooting skill and strategic planning ability . . .much more than a simple target shooting game because it was programmed with plenty of surprises and the same kind of variety that has made *Super Mario Bros.* a number-one favorite . . .requires great accuracy with the Zapper." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1986)

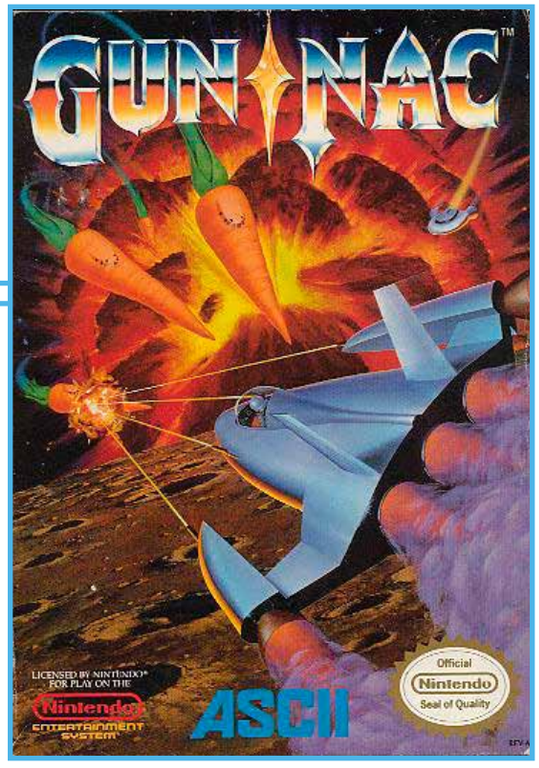
Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are bold, well-defined, and at times quite detailed for an early NES title . . . You will unfortunately find yourself losing a lot of lives in this game and find progressing through the game slow-going . . . If there were less enemies, travelling less quickly, and the platforming parts more forgiving, then the game might be more enjoyable . . . Nevertheless, if you're sick of shooting ducks and don't want to play like cowboys in the Wild West, you may want to consider giving *Gumshoe* a try just for the challenge alone." —Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)

Insider Insight: Black Box NES games always fascinated me, especially when I was a kid. I wanted to have them all, and for a time I thought I did. I got my NES with *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt/World Class Track Meet* and the Power Pad, and Nintendo had moved well beyond the Black Box stuff by then. It wasn't until I inherited a bunch of secondhand games from a friend that I came across a super cool poster with ROB's head on it that doubled as a checklist for all the Black Box titles! There's a *Volleyball* game? What's a *Mach Rider*? Is this *Gumshoe* game a platformer that uses the Zapper? I eventually tracked *Gumshoe* down at my local used game store and I was amazed. None of my friends had ever heard of it before, and nobody in magazines or anything ever seemed to talk about it. Clever gameplay, catchy music, colorful graphics—*Gumshoe* had it all! Why this game didn't take off will always be a mystery to me. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gun-Nac

PUBLISHER: ASCII Entertainment Software
DEVELOPER: Compile
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Obscure and hard to find, *Gun-Nac* is a fast, fun, and furious old-school vertical shooter with an amusing premise. In a distant solar system comprised of eight planets, animals (including giant cat and rabbit bosses), plants, and factory products have begun attacking people, and it is up to you, Commander Gun-Nac, to save the day. The ship you commandeer uses five different weapons: blaster, screen buster (circular blast), search driver (homing missiles), dragon napalm, and wide beam. If you grab the same weapon you already have it will increase in power, and you can pick up a wing that will make your ship larger and more powerful. You can also power up with fire, blizzard, thunder, water, and letter bombs, the last of which you can purchase and send to the next area. At times your ship will get so formidable that you can stay in one place, hold automatic fire down, and breeze right along without moving right or left; however, the difficulty level and speed does increase significantly beginning with planet three. The music keeps pace with the lively action and the planets are colorful and exhibit nice graphical detail, with ships, volcanoes, craters, spaces stations, trees, and the like dotting the landscapes.

Memories: I'm a big fan of vertical scrolling shooters, which I discovered in 1982 with *River Raid* on the Atari 2600 and *Xevious* in the arcades. These early examples of the genre paved the way for my fascination with such titles as *1942* (arcade, NES), *Truxton* (arcade, Genesis), and *Blazing Lazers* (TurboGrafx-16), the last of which reminds me a little of *Gun-Nac*. Fans of *Zanac* (NES) and *Raiden* (various) should enjoy *Gun-Nac* as well.

Notable Quotable:
"Packed full of enemy sizzling weapons . . .starts out pretty easy with tons of weapons and upgrades, but once you get to level 3, the speed and gameplay tactics become vital to your success . . .if you press down both A and B at the same time during the opening scene you can enable the option of invincibility. For me to beat the game this was the option I chose." —Brandon Perton (theoldschoolgamevault.com)

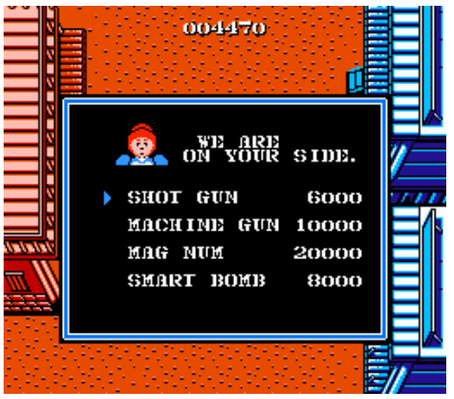
Notable Quotable:
"Fast paced, action packed . . . I normally don't enjoy shoot-'em-ups very much but this is one that hooked me; I couldn't put the controller down . . . I have found most shooters on the NES to be repetitive and shallow, but *Gun-Nac* is something else. The eight levels have loads of variety, and all the different weapons and power-ups keep the gameplay fresh . . . This game is awesome and has very few flaws . . .a hidden gem." —Trevor Harley (www.snailtoothgaming.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Four years had passed since the release of *Zanac*, and *Gun-Nac* is on a whole different planet, technologically. The graphics are much more attractive, the pacing is faster, and the sound quality is punchier." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gun.Smoke

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



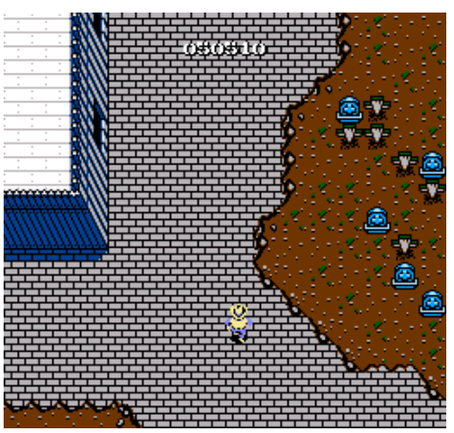
Adapted from Capcom's 1985 arcade game, *Gun.Smoke* for the NES is a distinct improvement, taking advantage of console format by allowing players to purchase weapons (shotgun, machine gun, magnum, bombs) and wanted posters, the latter of which must be acquired in each stage to reach that level's boss. The graphics are a little less detailed, but this cool gameplay mechanic more than makes up for it. The ingenious three-way firing system (straight ahead and diagonally to the right and left) has been left intact, but the port is not as brutally difficult.

The action has you guiding cowboy Billy Bob up the screen, firing away at punks, Indians, riflemen, snipers, and other bad guys. Destroying barrels reveals treasure, rifles, horses, and other useful items. Levels to play through include Town of Hicksville, The Boulders, Comanche Village, Death Mountain, Cheyenne Level, and Fort Wingate. Along with such diverse games as *Stampede* for the Atari 2600 and *Red Dead Redemption* for the PS2, this is one of the better Western-themed games for any console.

Memories: I didn't own *Gun.Smoke* back in the day, but I picked up a copy with manual at GameStop sometime in the early 2000s for a great price. I had always heard it was a quality shooter so I was glad to add it to the collection. It's a fun game I've spent a lot of time with over the years, but I haven't been able to beat it.

Notable Quotable:
"For a good blast, *Gun.Smoke* is just the tonic. It's similar in style but obviously different from and more challenging than *Commando*, and the action gets fast and furious very quickly." —*Zero* (February 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"The aging coin-op is reproduced nicely. Though repetitive and lacking real detail (as in the original), the smooth-scrolling backgrounds have a pleasing look, bringing the Wild West colorfully to the TV screen. Sprites could have more detail, but they're still representative of Western characters and are animated nicely. Title music is dramatic, and in-game a silly but fun tune bounces along . . . A good conversion with high playability and challenging if similar levels." —*The Games Machine* (December 1989)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Gyromite

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1985

Originally packaged alongside *Duck Hunt* with the NES Deluxe Set, *Gyromite* was designed for use with R.O.B., the Robotic Operating Buddy. You guide Professor Hector as he collects and defuses all the dynamite in rooms in 40 levels of play. To navigate the areas, Hector walks and climbs up and down ropes, but he has a tendency to fall off ledges. Blue and red columns get in the way, but you can lower them by pressing A and B on the second controller, or by pressing start to send the command to R.O.B., who will slowly maneuver spinning gyros and drop them to activate controller two. As Hector works his way around his lab he will be pestered by little green Smick creatures, whose deadly bites prove fatal for professors. To distract the Smicks, you can feed them turnips that randomly appear. If the professor falls in a hole the odds of a Smick capturing him increase significantly. Puzzle elements come into play, as it's easy to get trapped in a level before you get all the dynamite. In a second mode of play you control R.O.B. to guide Hector, who is sleepwalking.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"It does lack replay value, and the fact that playing single player requires the use of R.O.B. (which not only doesn't work, but is expensive these days) means that it's a mode that you probably won't want to touch . . .provides some decent fun, albeit it's short-lived with only 40 bite-sized stages . . .if you have a friend by your side, *Gyromite* provides some classic Nintendo charm." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Insider Insight: My first NES was the Deluxe Set that didn't come with *Super Mario Bros.* Instead it came with *Duck Hunt*, a Zapper gun, *Gyromite*, and R.O.B.

R.O.B. and *Gyromite* were decidedly different from the fast-paced platforming of *Super Mario Bros.*, and *Gyromite* demanded a high level of patience from the player. As the game wore on, the levels became more and more complicated, tasking the player with juggling multiple tops on different buttons, all while using the spinner to keep the gyros spinning. It was an exercise in frustration in those later levels, but I stuck with it. Figuring out how to get the two gyros from red to blue, and back to red to open the gates took careful planning, as the player had to constantly think a few steps ahead.

Gyromite was as fun as it was frustrating. It was a far cry from Mario's trek through the Mushroom Kingdom but it had its charm, I guess. Today, when old-school gamers wax nostalgic about the games we grew up with, I'm a little shocked that *Gyromite* is seldom mentioned. Everybody knows about Mario, but poor little R.O.B. is the forgotten hero of Nintendo's launch.

And sometimes, late at night as I slide softly into slumber, I swear I can still hear that spinner rev up the gyros, and my brain immediately begins to think about the next gate and how to get past it. I guess you could say that I will be forever haunted by R.O.B., my Robotic Operating Buddy. —Jon Hueber, who has been covering the video game industry for more than 20 years; find his work at www.electricbento.com

Gyruss

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1989

Sort of a cross between *Galaga* and *Tempest*, *Gyruss* has you guiding a Neo-Tesseract Cannon in a circular motion around the screen, shooting inward toward the center of the playfield at alien attackers that fly all around, and sometimes attack in waves. When bonus spheres attached to intergalactic mines appear, you should blast the mines, then fire into the center of the sphere for double firepower. The game has a good sense of progression as it takes you to the nine planets of our solar system (back when Pluto was still considered a planet). Between each planet are warp zones filled with attackers, and you will also encounter *Galaga*-like challenge stages where you'll earn bonus points and extra ships. The game has a number of upgrades over Konami's original arcade version from 1983, including an introduction by Genghis Khan; bosses; remixed music (including some new tunes); 39 stages (as opposed to 23); larger, more detailed graphics; and a special Ultra-Lazonic Phaser weapon, which cuts a swath through all the enemies in its path. Here the enemies look more like mechanized space bugs and less like conventional aircraft.

Memories: The NES is all about such legendary first-party titles as *Super Mario Bros.*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and *Metroid*, along with such excellent third-party adventures as *Castlevania*, *Contra*, and *Double Dragon;* however, as a hardcore old-school gamer who's been at it since 1975, I always appreciated when the console received ports of such simple "relics" as *Gyruss*.

Notable Quotable:

"We had some doubts about the viability of this oldie in today's video game scene, but our doubts were put away after a few rounds with what soon seemed like an old friend. The last time we reviewed home versions of *Gyruss* was nearly five years ago, when Parker Bros. released versions for several of the first wave game systems. We liked the game then, and Ultra's new version is even better on the more sophisticated Nintendo system. The action is very fast, and the hypnotic quality of the circular dance of spacecraft is enhanced by the varied musical settings of the different stages." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1989)

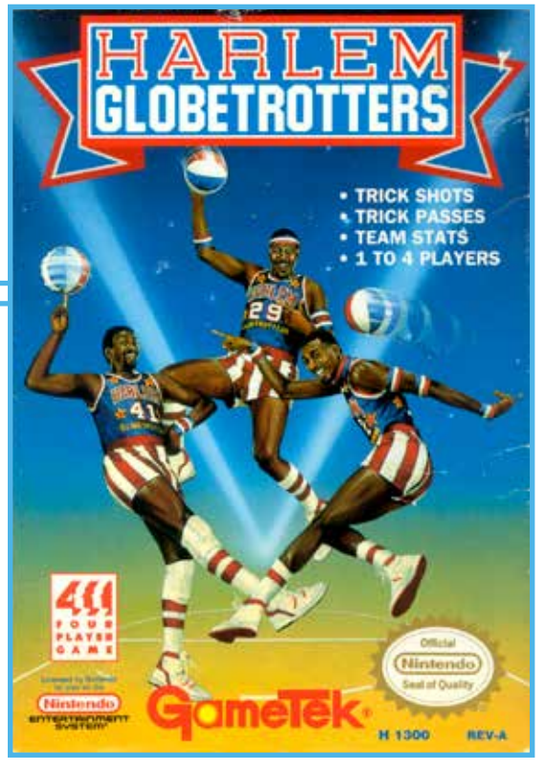
Notable Quotable:

"So excessively easy that it's a bore. You get five lives, and there's only one lame difficulty level. Unless you absolutely suck, you'll lose interest in the game far before you go through those five lives! The swirling aliens are huge compared to the original game, but that just makes them easier to shoot . . . Every few stages you'll encounter an unimaginative boss, usually taking the form of four connected pods (oh brother!). You also have a limited number of 'super shots,' but who even needs them? Ultra was clearly trying to 'beef up' *Gyruss* for the NES, but they inadvertently butchered it instead." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Harlem Globetrotters

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Softie
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Play as or against the "Clown Princes of Basketball" in this underwhelming [illegible]ndball title in which the elevated view [illegible] the side and the screen scrolls horizont[illegible]hen playing as the titular team gamers can execute the following trick maneuvers: behind-the-back pass, slam dunk, piggy back slam, pull down the referee's pants, trip the referee, and ball on elastic. Unfortunately, despite these funky flourishes, the game plays a fairly mundane rendition of five-on-five hoops. Most of the humor and pizzazz of the "real" team is missing, and they aren't even wearing their patented red, white, and blue uniforms. Fouls are seldom called, but most of the bare essentials are here, including jump balls, jump shots, steals, passes, rebounds, free throws, and cheerleaders. The shot clock is 45 seconds, and players can adjust quarter length and select from two difficulty levels. A single exhibition game is all that's available here, but that's more than you'll probably need.

Memories: I grew up in a suburb of Fort Worth, Texas, but we very rarely went into the city, even though it's an historical town with interesting things to do. Other than passing through on the way to visit relatives or go on vacation, the only memory I have of being in Fort Worth until I got a car of my own was a Harlem Globetrotters game at the Tarrant County Convention Center downtown. It was a magical night filled with hijinks and happiness, with Curly Neal, Meadowlark Lemon, and company performing their basketball trickery and wizardry. When it came to the NES, *Double Dribble* was my basketball title of choice because *Harlem Globetrotters* just doesn't take advantage of the sexy license.

Notable Quotable:

"The game is insanely hard. Even on 'rookie' mode it is incredibly hard to beat the game. I have heard that it is a bit easier to win if you play the Globetrotters. I tried that and maybe it technically was a bit easier, but not by much. That isn't surprising, actually. The NES seemed to think that making games insanely hard to beat was how players got their money's worth. I won't argue if they made it too easy it wouldn't be fun. But after 5 games you should not still be losing 146 to 78. Even for a Generals vs. Globetrotters game that is crazy . . .the color scheme bothered me . . .the Globetrotters were purple . . .the title screens had the Globetrotters wearing blue, so I am not sure why they had to be purple in the game." —Washington Generals Fan Blog (washingtongeneralsfan.blogspot.com)

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Hatris

PUBLISHER: Bullet-Proof Software
DEVELOPER: Bullet-Proof Software
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

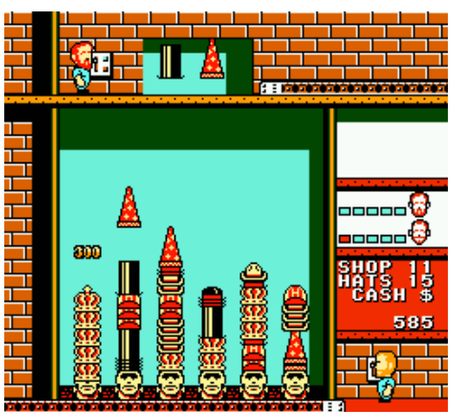
A falling object puzzler, *Hatris* was conceived by Alexey Pajitnov, the Russian designer of *Tetris*. The game replaces the blocks in *Tetris* with hats, putting an odd twist on the action puzzle subgenre. Hats fall in pairs, and the object is to stack them in vertical rows of five to make them disappear. There are six different types of hats: ball cap, cowboy hat, crown, derby, top hat, and wizard hat. As a pair of hats falls down the screen, players can switch the positions of those hats. As you progress through the game (there are six hat shops, each with 10 stages) hats fall faster, and more hats appear at the bottom of the screen, cluttering up the playfield and increasing the difficulty. Fortunately, the game designers, in the form of little men, appear on occasion to help you out. You can have them throw out unwanted hats and move stacks of hats to more strategic positions on the playfield. The hats are less versatile than *Tetris* blocks, making for a far shallower experience. The cartridge is a port of Video System's 1990 arcade game, which has a two-player split-screen mode, a more sophisticated title screen, and better, more colorful graphics.

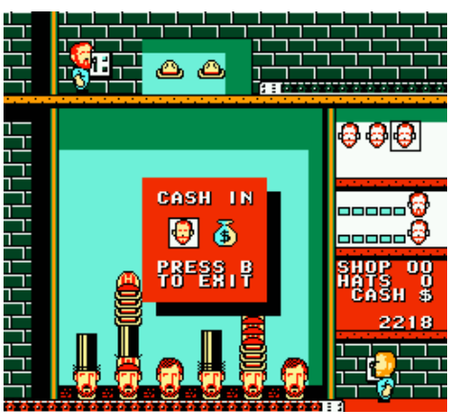
Memories: I'm a big fan of *Tetris* and many of the games it inspired, such as *Columns* and *Puyo Puyo*, but I just could never really get into *Hatris*. For a bad game I spent a fair amount of time with it, but hats simply don't make good falling puzzle pieces. I have a boxed copy if you want to make a trade.

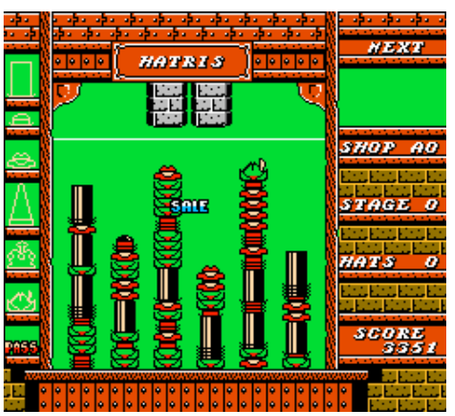
Notable Quotable:
"*Hatris*, like *Tetris*, is simple in concept and easy to understand . . .offers a turbo-speed mode for advanced players, but it doesn't seem much more super-charged than the normal game speed . . .an average puzzle game . . . For more of a challenge try the Game Boy version." —*Game Players* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Part of what makes a game like *Tetris* so compelling is that it has a risk/reward mechanic . . .you can spend your time clearing one or two lines at once, but everybody knows that the big points are rewarded for clearing all four. But doing that forces the player to be patient, something that could ultimately end in a Game Over screen. But that risk is what is so intoxicating about *Tetris*. It forces you to start to make bets on your own playing, keeping you engaged in an already exciting exercise of space management. *Hatris* doesn't have that level of depth. There's no way to get combo points or earn the equivalent of a 'Tetris' (four lines being erased at once). Instead, you just stack the hats ever higher . . . There's nothing in this game pushing you to do better." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING







Heavy Barrel

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

While it lacks the rotary control of Data East's visually sharper arcade from 1987 (meaning players can only fire in the direct[illegible] are moving), *Heavy Barrel* for the N[illegible] still more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Players run around seven different levels—Surface Defenses, Weapons Assembly Area, The Quarry, The Maze, The Reactor Area, The Abyss, and Launch Authority Security Area—using such weapons as guns, grenades, and a flamethrower to blow away terrorists (including those equipped with jetpacks), coal cars, tanks, helicopters, fortified gun bunkers, gun turrets, machine gunners, and other enemies and obstacles. The only way to progress from one area to the next is to blow holes through sealed doors. Watch out for poisonous insects that are deadly to the touch. Finding keys lets players open six different storage lockers containing pieces of a special Heavy Barrel weapon. Lockers can also hold standard weapons and ammunition.

Notable Quotable:

"The home version of *Heavy Barrel* is slower paced than its arcade cousin. The screen scrolls very slowly and your movement isn't as brisk . . .while the pace is different the game is still intense . . . There are significantly less enemies than in the arcade, although there is still some heavy sprite flickering . . . I had no trouble completing this in one sitting back in the day, and it still applies now . . . I would recommend *Guerrilla War* first, but *Heavy Barrel* makes for a good second-choice pick." —Classic-Games.net (www.classic-games.net)

Notable Quotable:

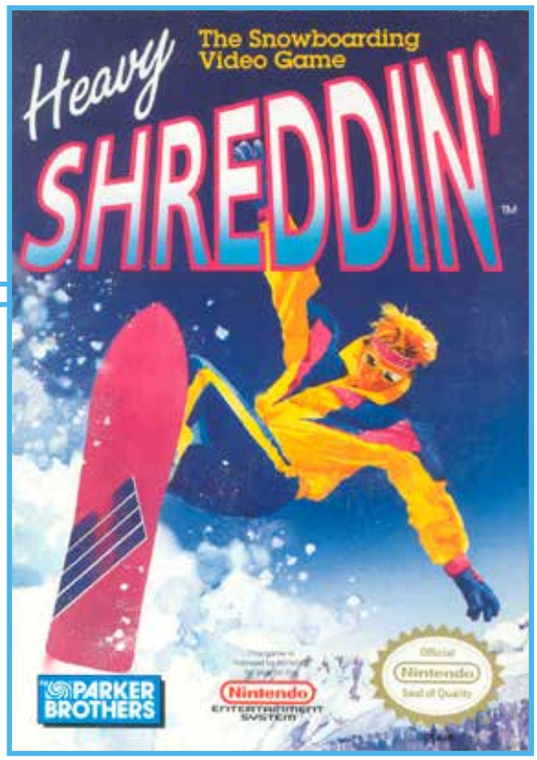
"Although it controls a bit haphazardly, *Heavy Barrel* has all the diversity and shooting power it needs to sustain itself as something different from *Commando* and similar games. The goal of piecing together a mega-gun is a nice sub-plot, but the straight action is the strong point . . . The graphics are very well done, scroll smoothly, and change often . . .the action is constant . . . The objective of constructing the Heavy Barrel is good, but the weapon doesn't last long enough." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1990)

Insider Insight: I discovered *Heavy Barrel* for the NES when I was in middle school. I lived in a small, rural town in Northern California, and "going to town" was a fairly big event. We would typically rent a movie and get a pizza, and at times I could rent a game for my NES. The selection of games at the rental store was decent, as the NES was popular at the time (1990–91), and it probably brought in some decent revenue for the shop owner. My brother and I always looked for two-player games, and one time we chose *Heavy Barrel*. I had played the game in the arcades a few times so I was happy to see the NES port. We played it the entire weekend. Although we played other military games on the NES, such as *Ikari Warriors* and *Guerrilla War*, we enjoyed *Heavy Barrel* the most. It was a great rental that was fun for two players in short bursts. We rented it a few times and then moved on to other games and consoles. I miss those days of playing a single game with my brother for a weekend. Those were simpler times. —"The Immortal" John Hancock, YouTube personality

OSCHIFER PUBLISHING

Heavy Shreddin'

PUBLISHER: Parker Brothers
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Sports/ Snowboarding, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Heavy Shreddin' has players snowboarding as fast as possible down Poseur Peak, Scaly Summit, and Mt. Mortified. Action is viewed from the side as it scrolls diagonally and horizontally (the changes are abrupt). Players will perform stunts and duck under, jump over, or otherwise dodge such obstacles as cliffs, trees, ice ponds, rolling rocks, tunnels, billboards, fences, semi-trucks, and skiers. There are three degrees of difficulty on each mountain and 18 levels of play spread over five events: Downhill, Slalom, Half-pipe, Moguls, and Backwoods. You can execute four different stunts: toe grab, hand-plant, mid-air 360, and mule kick. Strict collision detection means that barely touching a tree will make you crash, sending you to the beginning of the level. The bright snow, green trees, and sweater-wearing skiers look decent, and the looping song that plays throughout won't drive you nuts.

Memories: Snowboarding was invented during the mid-1960s, and the sport wasn't added to the Winter Olympics until 1998, so in 1990, when *Heavy Shreddin'* was released, we were dealing with a young sport that many Americans weren't altogether familiar with. *Heavy Shreddin'* was the first snowboarding video game and it essentially plays like a bad skiing title. The genre would improve drastically later with such titles as *SSX Tricky* and *1080° Snowboarding*. In short, *Heavy Shreddin'*, like its totally tubular name, hasn't aged well.

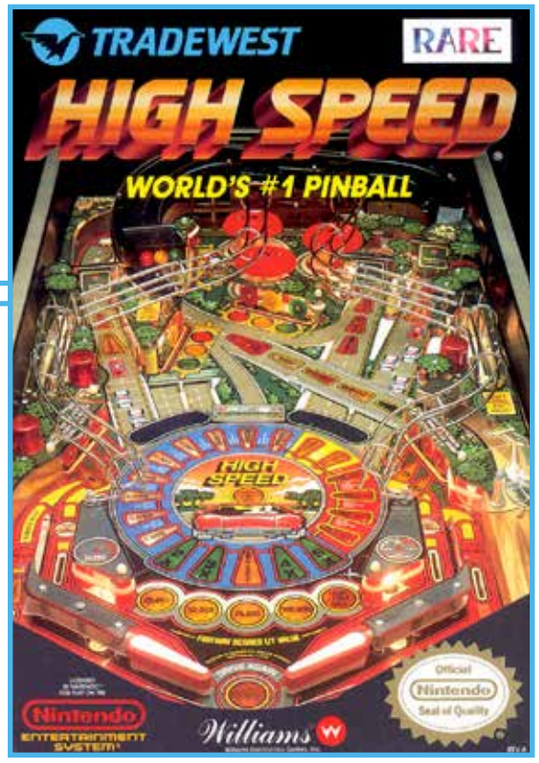
Notable Quotable:
"The game's idea of doing a 'stunt' involves stopping in the middle of a slope to do a handstand! Wow, that looks really stupid! . . . The controls are so poorly designed that my friends would routinely ask, 'Why did my guy just do that?!' Adding insult to injury, the collision detection is so unforgiving that merely brushing against a tree causes your boarder to fall, forcing you to restart the entire stage! Just completing the opening stage requires a flawless run—*at full speed no less*!" —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Although I got a great sense of satisfaction when I concluded the last course and received a trophy, there was some disappointment that this was it. Not trying to undermine the content provided for you in the six courses, because there's a lot, but the material gets reused a ton. Albeit they get used in clever, tricky patterns . . .a bit more stuff would have made for a fleshed out and longer NES release. Looking at it from an old-school point of view, however, *Heavy Shreddin'* loops, so you can test your endurance and turn this into a high-score marathon . . . Some are going to crucify me for saying this, but once you understand its play mechanics, there isn't much to separate *Heavy Shreddin'* from some of its modern-day counterparts." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

High Speed

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Pinball, 1–4 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991



Based on Williams' police chase-themed pinball machine of the same name (1985), which takes place on the San Monica freeway, *High Speed* for the NES exits the console format by adding a number of features to the formula, most notably such enemies as an acid patch (which dissolves the ball), a water puddle, tumbleweeds (which pick up the ball and drop it between the flippers), rust balls (which dissolve the flipper mounting), heli-bombs, a manic mechanic (stuns and destroys the ball), and a magnetic helicopter (carries the ball off the playfield). Plus there's now a lightning bomb weapon, and the cartridge contains two bonus games: Pachinko and Race. You can shake the playfield left and right to influence the movement of the ball, and the screen scrolls to always show the ball and splits to always show the flippers. Includes voice effects.

Memories: The actual *High Speed* pinball machine, which I played at The Land of Oz arcade back in the day, was created by famed designer Steve Ritchie. He even lent his voice to the game as the dispatcher. According to an interview in one of my favorite pinball books, *The Pinball Compendium: 1982 to Present* (2012, Schiffer Publishing), Ritchie was inspired to create the machine by a true story: "I was chased and caught in my Porsche going 146 mph. I was on a new, relatively un-traveled straight, flat superhighway known as I-5 running between Sacramento and San Jose. I wanted to see how fast the car went. It was a great and very stable machine designed to do this kind of speed relatively safely. I had gone over 165 mph with sound man Chris Granner on a nice back road about three years ago in my Porsche 911 Carrera 4 . . . I sold it and I stopped getting speeding tickets."

Notable Quotable:
"If you are a pinball fan, this is the best pinball for the NES to date, much better than Nintendo's original pinball. Take it for a spin and see what you think!" —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (July 1991)

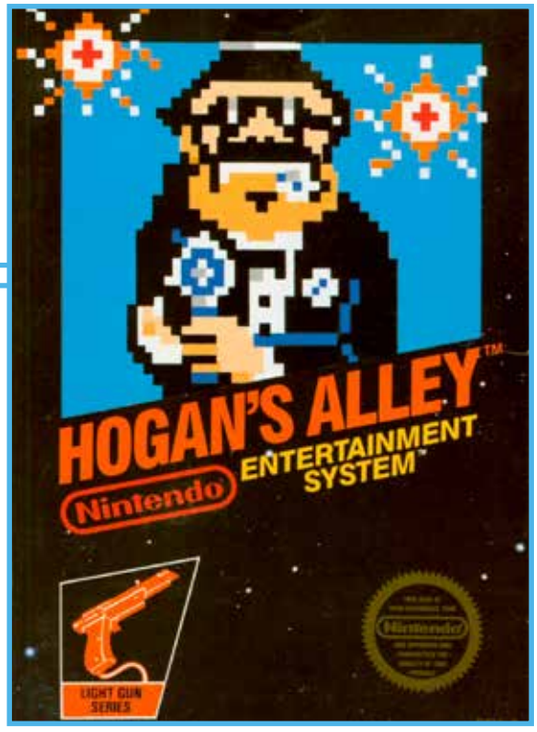
Notable Quotable:
"If you already have *Pin-Bot* then you'll know exactly what to expect from *High Speed*. The setup is the same, only with a new playfield and the inclusion of some new bonus rounds. The game looks good, but the play is a little frustrating when the game quits becoming a pinball title." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1991)

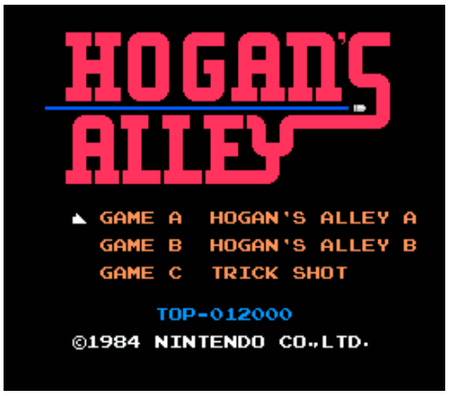
Notable Quotable:
"I'm not a big fan of the real pinball game *High Speed*, but the Nintendo version is pretty fun . . .graphics are decent . . .sounds are pretty cool, quite similar to the real High Speed game." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Hogan's Alley

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems/Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1985





A very nice port of Nintendo's 1984 arcade game, which was a part of the VS. series of machines, *Hogan's Alley* was a launch title. The game has players point the Zapper gun at the screen, firing at targets. In game A, three panels appear in a row, facing sideways. The three panels will then turn in unison, displaying a drawing of a person on each panel. Players should shoot the gangster panels (there are three types of gangsters) while avoiding the lady, the professor, and the policeman. In game B similar rules apply, but with panels appearing in the windows of buildings and around said buildings. Game C is Trick Shot, in which spinning cans move from right to left across the screen. Players must shoot the cans to keep them from falling too far and to guide them to platforms of varying point values. *Hogan's Alley* is a solid game that works well with the Zapper, but it does have one flaw. In the arcade original you can experience all three game modes in one round of play, but here they are all separated.

Memories: After getting my NES for Christmas in 1987, *Hogan's Alley* was one of the first games I bought because I loved the arcade version, and because the screenshots looked just like said coin-op game. I like *Duck Hunt*, but I spent a lot more time with this game.

Notable Quotable:

"Irresistibly challenging . . .graphics are quite good on all three games . . .comically drawn characters are especially delightful. Both the second and third games held our interest easily and offered good tests of reaction time and discrimination . . .the long time between rounds spoils the fun of the first game. However, two out of three still makes this game a very worthwhile addition to your library of Nintendo Entertainment System games." —*Computer Entertainer* (May 1986)

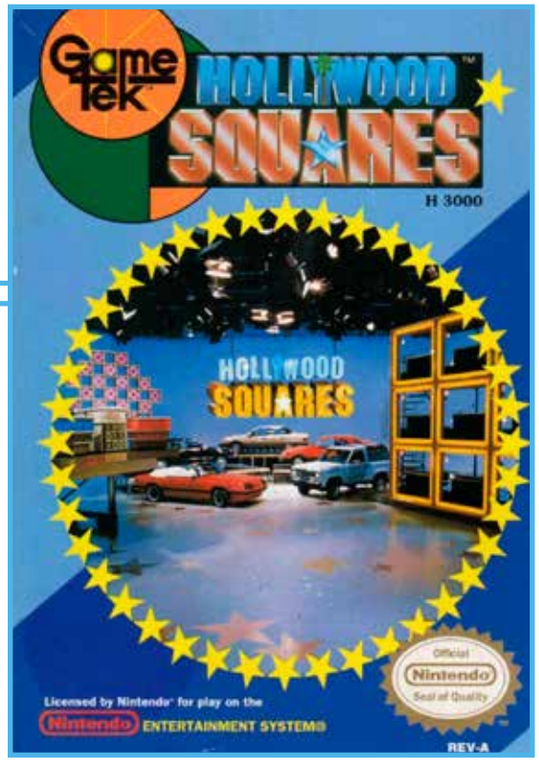
Notable Quotable:

"You need to have sharp reflexes . . . *Hogan's Alley* is a fine addition to the NES library and is more than just shooting bad guys, or cardboard cutouts of them at least . . . You have to think about what bad guys are on the screen and try to shoot them in a small amount of time, or shoot the cans at the right time so that the trajectory is correct . . . It's great that although the premise of game mode A and B is the same the background differs, which gives it a fresh take." —UKNESBOY (uknesboy.wordpress.com)

SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Hollywood Squares

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



You won't find Paul Lynde or any other real-life celebrities in *Hollywood Squares* for the NES, but it is a fun, e[illegible] play rendition of the classic TV game s[illegible]hich is a cross of sorts between a trivia contest and tic-tac-toe. The playfield is a 3 × 3 grid of pseudo celebrities. When it's the player's turn, he or she must select a celebrity. That celebrity will be asked a question, and the player must decide whether or not the celebrity is giving the correct answer. If the player guesses correctly, the space that celebrity occupies will be filled with an X or an O. If a player gets three Xs or Os in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) he or she will win. The fictional game show host (John Davidson, who hosted the TV show from 1986 to 1989, is regrettably absent) and other characters blink, smile, and turn their heads a bit, and the jokey answers to the questions are oftentimes very funny. Unfortunately, questions begin repeating after a few rounds of play because there are fewer than 500 of them.

Memories: I remember funnyman Paul Lynde fondly for three things: the *Bewitched* TV show (where he played Uncle Arthur), the *Paul Lynde Halloween Special* featuring KISS, and his occupancy of the middle square on *Hollywood Squares*. It's a shame they didn't put him in this game.

Notable Quotable:

"Much of the appeal of the TV game show is in the personalities of the celebrities and their seemingly impromptu joking answers. In the NES version, you get the jokes but without the personalities of the celebrities. *Hollywood Squares* just doesn't hold much interest in the NES format." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Plays exactly like the game show . . . The jokes the squares tell are awful . . . I have seen all this game has to offer, and even if I didn't win the car, I beat my computer opponent. But you wouldn't know that from looking at the photo telling me that I have 'bad luck.'" —Hoz's 8-Bit NES Quest (hoz14nes.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics in the game are pretty good. All characters have only two expressions that they alternate between and the 'set' looks faithful to the show. Sound also isn't bad, with good themes and some nice timer/buzzing in effects. It's too bad that the game isn't fun. If you like the *Squares* then you might enjoy this for a little bit. Otherwise, there are no celebrities here or fun moments that make the show bearable. The trivia isn't interesting, and it's not very difficult since the A.I. never puts up a real fight, and you automatically have a 50/50 chance to get every answer right. So take away the comedians and the trivia and you're left with a game of tic-tac-toe. And let's face it, that game was so boring that it made Dr. Falken's defense computer want to give up on protecting the U.S. and go play chess instead." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Home Alone

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks
GAME TYPE: Action, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

Home Alone for the NES is based on the climax of the 1990 feature film, which brought in nearly $500 million at the box office (an astonishing number, especially for a comedy). Unfortunately, the game is characterized by glitch-ridden programming, imprecise control (beginning a climb is especially unforgiving), and simple (not in a good way) gameplay. Unlike the movie ending, the two bad guys are already in the house when the game begins. The player, as Kevin (portrayed by Macaulay Culkin in the film), must run around his house, setting traps for Marv and Harry, who remain in hot pursuit. Each trap, be it a light bulb, a soda can, a water balloon, or other such item, behaves the same, stalling the bumbling bandits for a few seconds. The objective is to avoid making contact with Marv and Harry for 20 real-time minutes, which is when the police arrive.

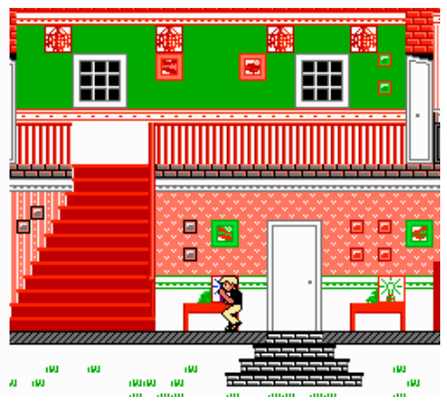
Memories: When *Home Alone* was first released in theaters, I had no interest in seeing it. The film had a lot of buzz and I was impressed with the box office numbers, so a friend and I decided to check it out when it hit the local dollar theater. We thought it was okay, but I've grown to appreciate the movie over the years as a fairly good Christmas comedy with likable performances. The NES game . . .not so much.

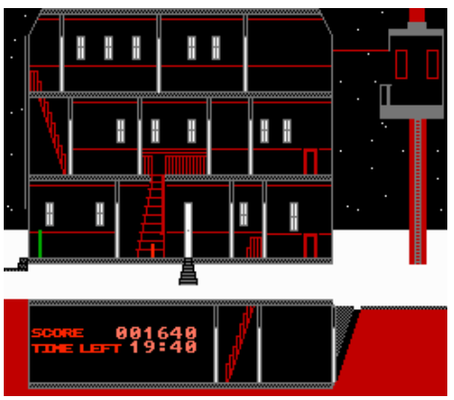
Notable Quotable:

"Harry and Marv, aside from Harry being short and Marv being tall, look absolutely nothing like their movie counterparts . . .the traps suck. In the movie you had awesome things like face ironing, hand-branding, and eventually shovel beating. That's not the case here. Instead, you just put little boxes of random things on the ground . . . You have to be precisely at the right place to climb." —Game Cola (gamecola.net)

Notable Quotable:

"Quite possibly the third or fourth worst movie-to-game adaptation ever . . . There is a certain strategy to placing the traps since the burglars move a lot faster than you . . . If you're looking for hilarious outcomes for each of the items, you should just watch the movie instead . . . The controls only contribute to the difficulty, to the point where simple stairs become a horrible obstacle to overcome, not to mention a delay in reaction between hitting a button and what happens on screen . . . The visuals of the house are detailed . . .the theme song plays in one continuous loop." —Brad Hicks (swankworld.com)





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Imagineering
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

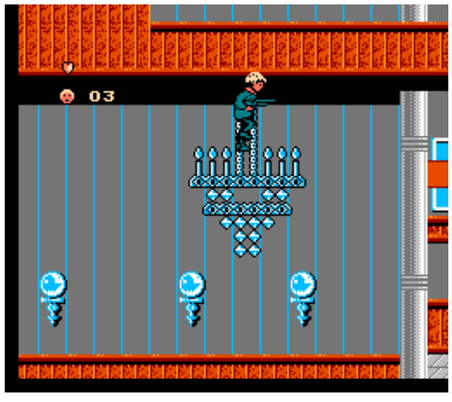
Unlike the first *Home Alone* game for the NES, which at least followed part of the plot of the source material, *Home Alone 2* bears little resemblance to the 1992 movie of the same name. One concession to the film is the periodic appearance of the "Wet Bandits," Marv and Harry, who pursue Kevin McCallister, who is once again separated from his family. You guide Kevin as he runs, jumps, ducks, finds keys to open doors, and rides elevators in such New York locales as the Plaza Hotel, Central Park, and his uncle's townhouse. He also dodges such obstacles as suitcases, vacuum cleaners, and falling plaster. There are bomb-throwing shop clerks to look out for as well. To battle the two baddies Kevin slides into them, shoots them with darts, uses a flying fist maneuver, and places necklaces that make them slip off the screen. To power-up Kevin can grab pizza for extra lives, cookies to recover power units, candy canes for invincibility, aftershave for speed and invulnerability, and bells for a spin-jump attack maneuver. The game ends at the Rockefeller Plaza Christmas tree, where Kevin must climb to the top to be rid of his arch nemeses for good. Thanks to poor controls and lousy graphics this is one of the worst platformers on the NES.

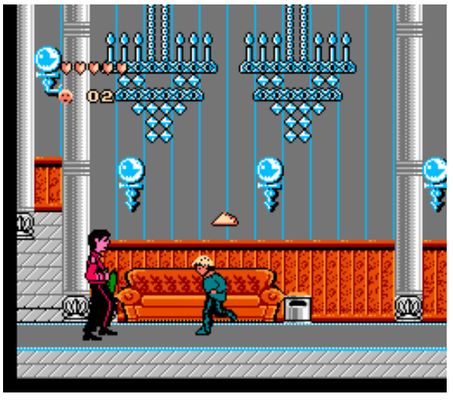
Notable Quotable:
"The controls are appallingly bad, the visuals are sloppy, and the frustration level is extremely high. There's no excuse for a game released so late in the NES' life to be this bad." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The video game of the first *Home Alone* movie wasn't exactly the game of the year last year. The sequel (for any of the game systems) unfortunately follows the same tradition and needs a little polishing. It may be a good idea for THQ to note that players expect more than a mediocre game for their money." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly's 1993 Video Game Buyer's Guide*, which named *Home Alone 2* the "Worst Video Game Sequel"

Notable Quotable:
"You'll be quite pleased and relieved when the game is over . . . There are issues where you never know what you can jump onto; in the hotel alone there are planters that you CAN jump on and others you can't . . . The game world itself is somewhat detailed . . .bland, generic backgrounds . . .feels hastily designed . . .difficult for all the wrong reasons . . .if you know what you're doing the game is pretty short." —Random Access (randomacc.net)

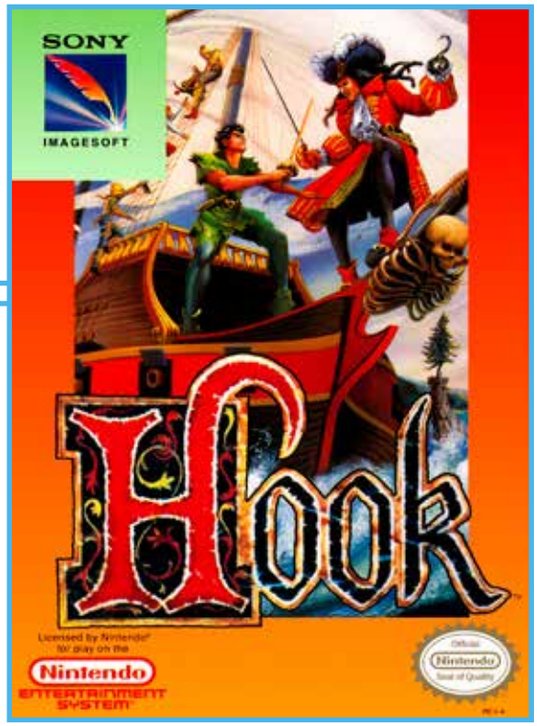
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Hook

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1992



Peter Banning was a content, middle-aged attorney until Granny Wendy told him about a time he had long forgotten. Decades ago he lived as Peter Pan in Never[illegible] where he didn't want to grow up. Now [illegible] return to Neverland to rescue his children from the evil Captain Hook. Based on the 1991 fantasy film, which was directed by Steven Spielberg, the game lets you guide Peter Pan through the forests, caves, underground caverns, lagoons, and icy regions of Neverland. In each level you must collect a specific number of items to complete and exit the area. Throughout the multi-scrolling, 16-level adventure, Peter will climb ladders and ropes, swim and fly past obstacles, jump on moving platforms, use a metal detector to locate treasure, and call on Tink to help defeat pirates, spiders, penguins, banana-throwing monkeys, and other enemies. Most of the levels are action/platforming, but there's also one-on-one sword fighting (against Rufio and Captain Hook) and third-person flying (where you view Peter from behind).

SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

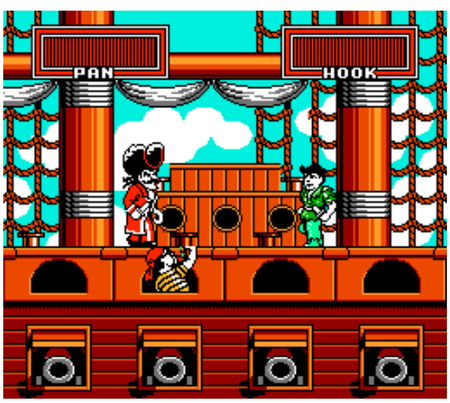
"*Hook* is a fantastic feature film, but it doesn't translate very well to console." —*N-Force* (June 1992)

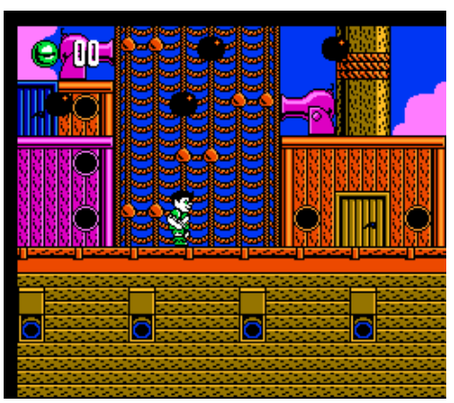
Notable Quotable:

"Although *Hook* sports bold, crisp, colorful graphics, tolerable music, and moderate challenge level, there's a troubling flaw—gameplay. Pan can jump high and survive long falls—a big plus. However, his limited range of sword swinging motion and lethargic forward movement make gameplay a bit of a drag. —*GamePro* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:

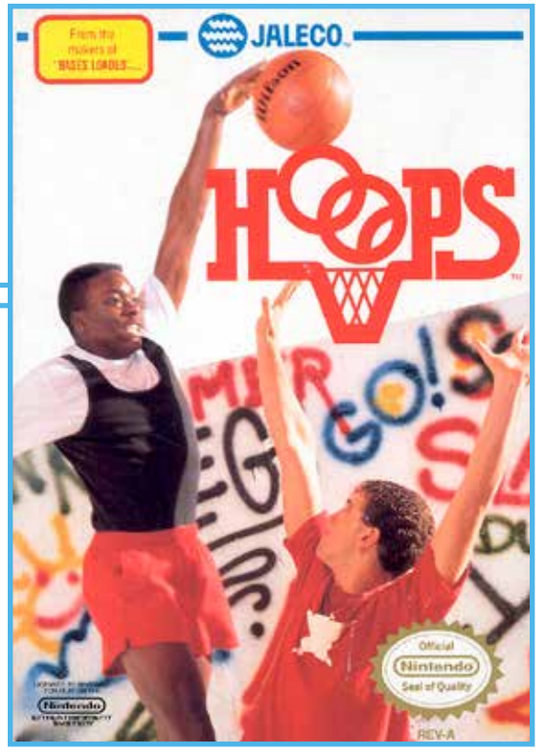
"The graphics don't look too bad; everything is pretty detailed and colorful. Except for your character, who I guess is supposed to be Peter Pan but looks more like Joe Pesci . . .you're better off just running through the level instead of fighting anyone . . . You get this pathetic little knife . . .it has little to do with the movie . . ..was probably only put out to convince kids to make the switch to the SNES." —Charlie Marsh (diehardgamefan.com)

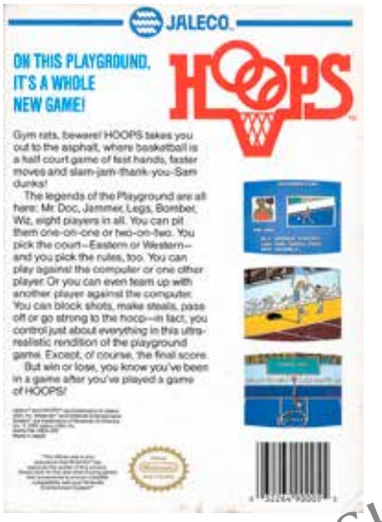




Hoops

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: Aicom
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989




JALECO
ON THIS PLAYGROUND, IT'S A WHOLE NEW GAME!
HOOPS
Gym rats, beware! HOOPS takes you out to the asphalt, where basketball is a half court game of fast hands, faster moves and slam-jam-thank-you-Sam dunks!
The legends of the Playground are all here: Mr. Doc, Jammer, Legs, Bomber, Wiz, eight players in all. You can pit them one-on-one or two-on-two. You pick the court—Eastern or Western—and you pick the rules, too. You can play against the computer or one other player. Or you can even team up with another player against the computer. You can block shots, make steals, pass off or go strong to the hoop—in fact, you control just about everything in this ultra-realistic rendition of the playground game. Except, of course, the final score.
But win or lose, you know you've been in a game after you've played a game of HOOPS!

Like the better (and better known) *Double Dribble* for the NES and the arcade, *Hoops* features close-up dunk animations. However, the game otherwise largely ignores the graphic established by the classic roundball title. Rather, it is a throwback to *One-on-One*, the old computer game starring Dr. J and Larry Bird (it even includes a player called Mr. Doc). Viewed from above/behind the top of the key, *Hoops* features one-on-one and two-on-two street ball, with players competing against one another or teaming up against the computer. There are a variety of foul calls that can occur and eight distinctive ballers to select from, each with different strengths and weaknesses. Unlike real basketball, steals are easier to pull off than making outside shots. You can play a single game, enter a tournament, or simply watch the computer play itself. You can even shoot for possession of the ball, like you might on the playground. *Hoops* may be old-fashioned, but it's a lot of fun. Included is a nifty game of Around the World, the popular shooting contest that is rarely seen in a video game.

Notable Quotable:

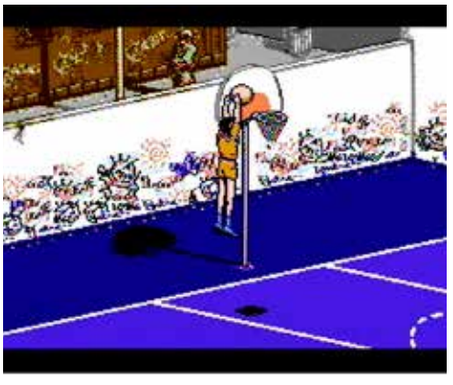
"*Hoops* just doesn't have enough variety. You play 30 games of basketball, and each one is about as difficult as the next. The graphics are more cartoony and the dunk sequences were done better in *Double Dribble*—a game that was out two years ago!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Fun for two players, but nothing to write home about compared to *Double Dribble* . . .the variety of players keeps the game from getting redundant, and the fact that there are penalties is excellent, since it forces you to play with finesse rather than brute strength . . .the screen gets muddy when the figures are together and the animation is just so-so. The closeup of the slam dunk isn't as cool as it should be." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

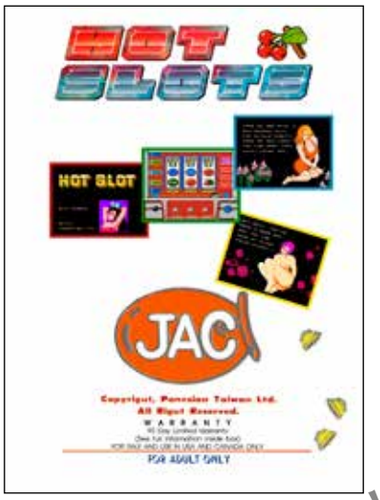
"Jaleco has already scored with a terrific baseball simulation (*Bases Loaded*) and this one adds to their sports stable admirably. The action is non-stop, with all the various ways to play a real plus. It will take you some time to master the ball handling, especially when you're playing against the computer, which never seems to miss a shot! The graphics are quite good . . . The closeup effect of the slam dunk shot is very impressive as the figures explode into larger-than-life players. The music was a slight annoyance to us, but we turned that down . . .a very strong entry in the basketball arena." —*Computer Entertainer* (February 1989)



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Hot Slots

PUBLISHER: Panesian
DEVELOPER: Hacker International
GAME TYPE: Gambling, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Like *Peek-A-Boo Poker* and *Bubble Bath Babes*, *Hot Slots* is an unlicensed adult game from Panesian that is very hard to find and contains 8-bit nudity. The game includes three different slot machines—Cutie Honey, Juicy Fruit, and Las Vegas—each of which is represented by a seductive babe who flirts and takes her clothes off when you win certain amounts of money. Each slot has different symbols on the reels and a different musical score. To get the reels spinning you put in one or more tokens (up to five), which the game calls medallions, to activate one or multiple lines and then pull the lever. Pressing the d-pad stops the spinning reels in the order you wish. Between spins you can switch to another machine if you'd like. The luck-based action is dull and the dialogue is laughably bad, but it makes humorous use of such suggestively ambiguous words as "slot" and "cherry."

Notable Quotable:

"A useless casino game . . .three very similar slot machines . . .poorly translated English. The game is sought after by collectors because of its rarity, not its gameplay." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

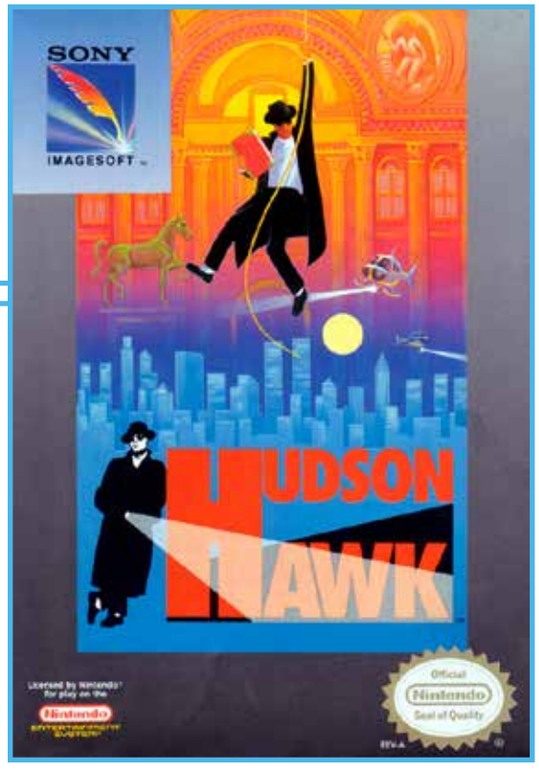
"You put your money into the machine, pull the lever, and hope you win. Yep, that's the entire game . . .it is incredibly hard to win anything . . . The slot machines run very fast and easy . . . There's no real game contained here, other than playing virtual slot machines, which is about as lively as being hooked up to a feeding tube and watching old game show reruns." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Memories: I occasionally go to Thackerville, Oklahoma, to visit Winstar Casino, which touts itself as the biggest casino in the world. Despite the facility's thousands of slot machines, there's never been one as pseudo-sexy as *Hot Slots*.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Hudson Hawk

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Hudson Hawk, which hit theaters in 1991, was one of the biggest box office bombs of the '90s, with a budget of $65 million and only grossing $17.2 million. For the sake of the producers hopefully it gained some of that back with the licensing of the NES game, which puts players in the title role played by Bruce Willis in the film. Hawk, an ex-cat burglar, is blackmailed into stealing priceless works of art from a heavily guarded auction house and from the Vatican. This involves running across floors of buildings; jumping over obstacles and up to high places; crawling under electric eyes and through booby-trapped ventilation shafts; climbing ladders and ropes; riding platform lifts; dodging bullets, steam, and guard dogs; going through doors, windows, and laundry chutes; and more. Having to push boxes into place to reach certain areas adds minor puzzle elements to the game. To fend off enemies Hawk can punch and throw softballs.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the worst movie adaptations of all time . . . The game's painful difficulty isn't helped by the annoying trial and error gameplay. There is one correct path through each building, but finding the right way means banging your head against the wall until you get it right. The sluggish controls, frustrating enemies, and unfair leaps of faith only accentuate what is bad about this late generation NES release . . .has very little to do with the movie." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

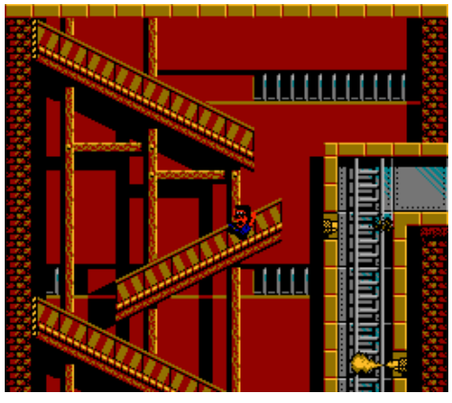
Notable Quotable:

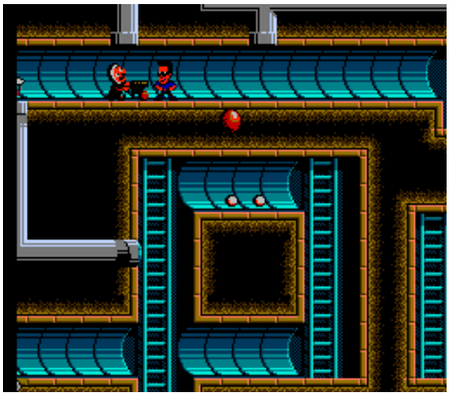
"The controls aren't particularly responsive, especially if you're trying to make a jump without much ramp-up time . . . Very little about this game is intuitive . . . There are a lot of frustrating aspects to this game. Pushing boxes, which you need to jump over obstacles, punishes you if you push the box too far by teleporting the box behind you. Walking into an enemy not only damages you but also bounces you around, often to your death. Sources of damage aren't particularly obvious . . . With its poor graphics, finicky controls, and unintuitive levels and user interface, it's likely to be more a source of frustration than fun." —Cannot be Tamed (YouTube)

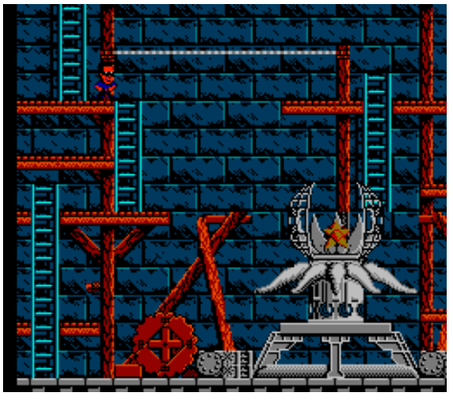
Notable Quotable:

"Based on one of the biggest box office bombs of the '90s, *Hudson Hawk* thankfully isn't another conventional NES platformer. The emphasis is on solving puzzles, but the controls are overly touchy, and there are too many opportunities for cheap deaths to make the game enjoyable . . . The unnecessarily difficult gameplay consists of overcoming obstacles by manipulating objects and through traditional action. For example, you have to stack boxes to climb through a window and then throw a baseball at a guard to knock him out. Unfortunately, the game has too much action to be an adventure game and too much adventure to be an action game." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

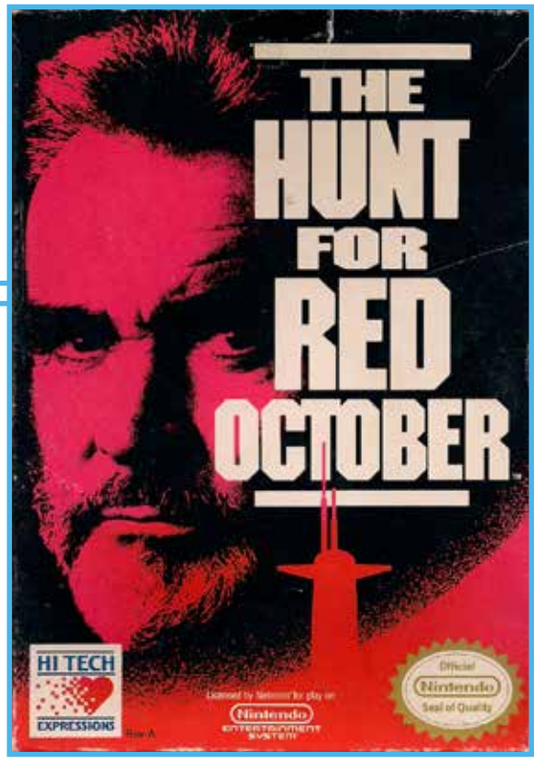






The Hunt for Red October

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



The Hunt for Red October is different than most movie based games in that it's a simple underwater side-scroller, rather than an action/adventure game that incorporates a variety of genres and locations. You, as Captain Marko Ramius, pilot the Soviet Typhoon submarine *Red October* through hazardous waters in hopes of reaching a US port. The sub is equipped with armor, electronic countermeasures (which act as decoys), upgradeable torpedoes (for horizontal shooting), missiles (for vertical shooting), and caterpillar drive (for invisibility). In addition to shooting enemy ships you must grab fuel and avoid walls. The seventh and final level is a platforming area where you disarm six bombs scattered across the submarine's weapon bays. Compared to the 1990 film (or to most any other shooter) this game is decidedly weak, plagued as it is by repetitious sounds, lousy graphics (which include backgrounds consisting of purple bricks), and slow, frustrating gameplay. It doesn't help that the playfield only takes up ⅔ of the screen.

Notable Quotable:

"The background music is as bleak and dreary as a Cold War underwater thriller could possibly be . . .slow-paced and boring . . .painful controls . . .involved cutscenes; at least it tries to convey some of the story . . .enemy subs pop up out of nowhere to ram your hull. You're left with no other recourse than to turn on your shields and pray . . .promising concept, but the end result sucks." — CGRundertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The game sluggishly auto-scrolls like a classic shmup with a severe injury, but also requires you to manually advance. You thus wind up with segments that would be effective in one type of shooter and not so much in the other . . . Because you're underwater the game's control response is pretty awkward . . .evading enemy shots is trickier than it should be. The sub builds momentum too quickly, going from sluggish to breakneck in an instant. This also causes the vessel to slow to a halt rather than do so on a dime. I realize that makes for more realistic physics, but sometimes video games are better off forsaking realism . . .another forgettable movie game with a steep difficulty generated by poor mechanics." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Hydlide

PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: T&E Soft
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

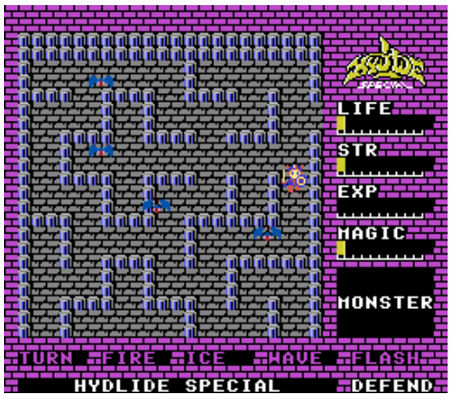
The storyline for *Hydlide*, which revolves around Princess Ann being turned into three fairies, is as lame as the game itself. Cast in the role of a brave young knight named Jim, players walk (in four directions) around an overworld (forests, deserts, plains, swamps, and the like), leveling up by slaying goblins, wizards, dragons, slimes, poison wasps, zombies, vampire bats, sandworms, skeletons, and other generic enemies. The seemingly endless grinding gets old in a hurry. The limp, ill-conceived battle system has you holding down the A button and simply running into the various creatures. Holding down B in conjunction with A unleashes fire, ice, shockwaves, and other magical attacks, while pressing neither button puts Jim in defend mode. Treasures to find during this ugly little adventure include a sword of the brave (increases attack power), a shield of justice (increases defense power), immortal medicine (restores your life with full Hit points), an eternal lamp (for seeing in darkness), a magical vase (reveals a hole in the floor), and a secret key (opens the locked chest in the graveyard). If you do decide to play the game, even after reading this, turn down the limited sound effects and repetitious, high-pitched, unimaginative music.

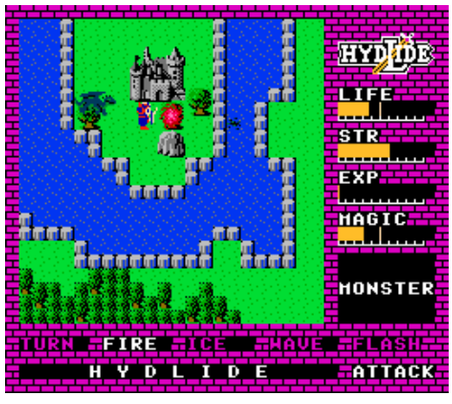
Memories: I'm not much of an RPG fan, but for reasons that escape me now I bought *Hydlide* when it was still new in stores, either in 1989 or early 1990. During this time I worked at a retail chain in the Dallas/Fort Worth area called Lone Star Comics. A co-worker of mine had made the mistake of purchasing LJN's *The Uncanny X-Men*. He was desperate to get rid of the game because it was so awful, and I had no use for the execrable *Hydlide*, so we traded—each of us assumed the other game couldn't be any worse than the cartridge we had bought. With its tiny/ugly characters and crappy gameplay *The Uncanny X-Men* was indeed awful, but I figured I got the better deal, as it has much cooler box art than *Hydlide*. Somehow *Hydlide* spawned three sequels: *Hydlide II: Shine of Darkness* (various), *Super Hydlide* (various), and *Virtual Hydlide* (Sega Saturn).

Notable Quotable:
"*Hydlide* is a good game with graphics that are average and music that is not too terribly annoying. 90% of the game is comprised of building up energy to play the other 10%. A good alternative to *Ultima*, *Zelda*, and other quest-oriented RPG games." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Characters are quite small in this world, and we didn't find the graphic treatment very interesting . . .very frustrating. The young knight starts the game with so little in the way of life and strength that he is very easily and quickly defeated by even the lowliest of monsters . . .managed to make us feel like complete beginners." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"*Hydlide* was irritatingly difficult and frustratingly vague, with terrible graphics, repetitive music, and an awkward combat system." —Robert Greene (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

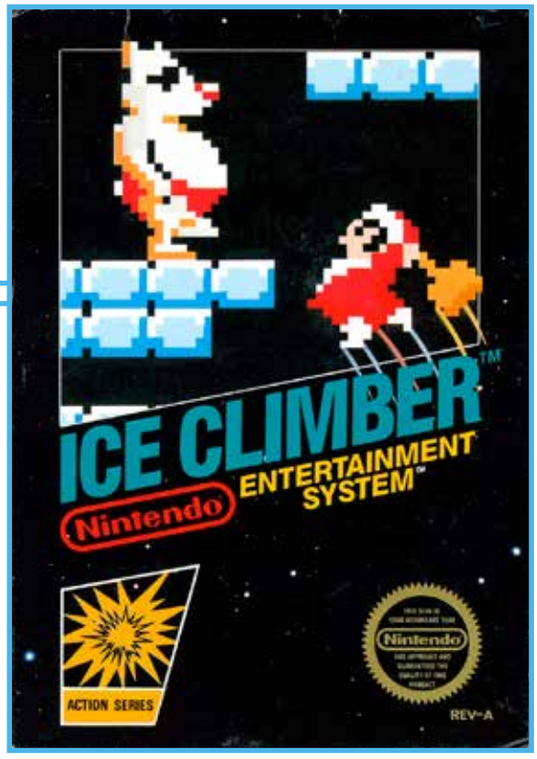




OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ice Climber

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1985



Armed with an ice hammer, you must climb 32 multi-leveled mountains. Each mountain is basically a series of platforms, many of them covered in ice. To achieve your mountain climbing goal you must break holes in the floors above you so you can jump up to higher and higher platforms. While you scale the slopes Toppies will sometimes fill in the holes you have made. Also, polar bears will cause avalanches, and Nitpicker birds and other pests will try to knock you off of the mountains. You can clock these creeps with your hammer to remove them from the screen. When you make it to the top of each mountain, you will enter a timed bonus round where you gather vegetables. You can play *Ice Climber* by yourself or team up with a friend. If you ascend a mountain too rapidly in two-player mode your partner is left behind, biting the proverbial dust. The controls are a bit clunky but *Ice Climber*, a system launch title, oozes with old-school charms and challenges.

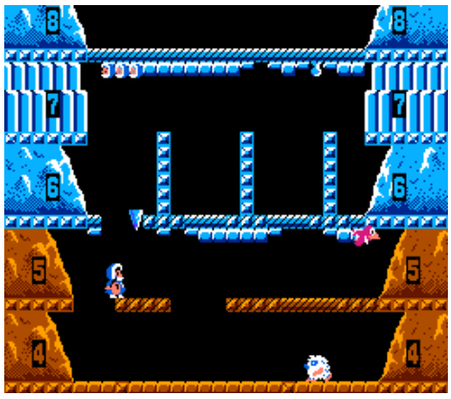
SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

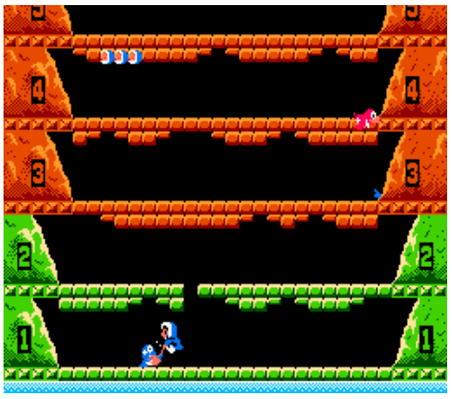
Notable Quotable:

"Addictive for fans of the genre . . . The colors and graphics are typically very good, and the gameplay is quite varied from mountain to mountain, allowing for hours of challenging play." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1986)

Insider Insight: It was 1989. The noisy Brazilian family that rented the house adjoined to ours had moved out and the actual owners of the property were back after five years of living in America. We had never met them, so I was excited to discover they had a pair of sons roughly the same age as me and my younger brother. We were even happier to discover that both Martin and John had an NES and were really into video games. The console wasn't very successful in the UK, and the only place we had ever seen one was in a pharmacy chain called Boots. Martin explained they had owned one in America where "everybody had one" and was surprised to find out that the machine was less popular back home. He just had two games: *Super Mario Bros.* and *Ice Climber*.

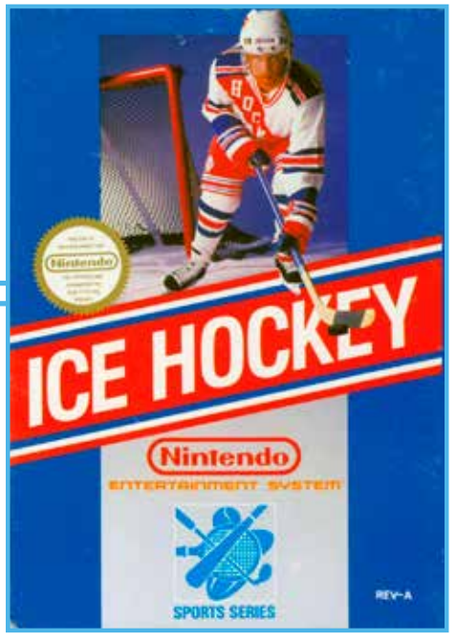
Soon after my brother and I became addicted to *Ice Climber*—it was a two-player co-op game, which reminded us of *Bubble Bobble* in that regard. It had a simple concept, but the difficulty curve was just right to keep you playing. Although it was co-op, the game had a fun element of competition—who can get the farthest? Martin and I remained friends into adulthood until I moved away. When I heard from him again years later, one of the first things he said to me was, "Do you remember playing *Ice Climber*?" —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

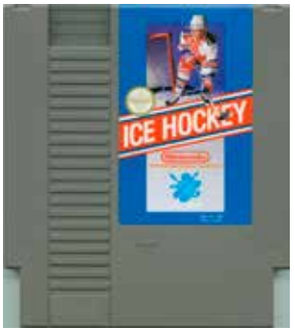




Ice Hockey

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo EAD/ Nintendo R&D2
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988





Although not as artfully titled as Konami's classic *Blades of Steel*, the more cartoonish *Ice Hockey* is also an excellent take on the icy sport. Armchair athletes can select from five game speeds, and they can form their own team by selecting the physical attributes (thin, fat, and average) of their players. These attributes determine the players' shooting strength and sticking, checking, and face-off abilities. You can also select game speed (1–5), period length (7 to 15 minutes), and team: USA, Sweden, Poland, Canada, Soviet Union, or Czechoslovakia. You shoot the puck by holding down the B button, or you can tap it to fake out your opponent. The B button also lets you change the defensive player to the one nearest the puck, and pressing it continuously gathers the players in front of the goal to fortify your defense. The A button is used for both passes and fake passes. Before each match you can adjust the game's speed (from one to five) and period length (from 7 to 15 minutes). Beware of icing violations, and during battles for the puck a fight might break out, with a player going to the penalty box. Between periods Zamboni machines drive across the ice, which is viewed from overhead.

Notable Quotable:

"Loads of fun . . . We especially like the ability to change your team's attributes, allowing for very varied play. The feel of the game is quite good, and you'll have fine control over your goalkeeper as you guard the net. . .the action is fast and furious . . .a highly satisfying hockey game." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"Like *Double Dribble*, this is a terrific cartridge for the family, not only because of the competition, but because of the different levels of play. It's also a pretty faithful recreation of the hockey experience . . .right down to the puck often being impossible to see! One drawback: Unlike *Double Dribble*, *Ice Hockey* doesn't have those spectacular close-up graphics of an attempted score. It would have been something to see approaching players from the goalie's point of view!" – *How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

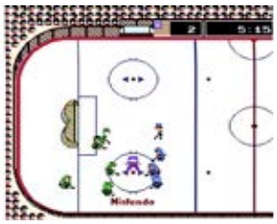
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: It was summer 1988, and our family was taking our weekly drive into town to rent a movie and a game. Our local selection was limited, but there were always a few new NES titles available. As I walked into the rental store, I was disappointed to notice that most of the NES games had already been rented. My family selected a movie and were waiting on me to decide what to get. The rule in my house was that if I took too long to decide then I couldn't rent a game. It came down to *Operation Wolf* and *Ice Hockey*. I took a gamble on *Ice Hockey* and it turned out to be a great choice. I spent that afternoon playing it against my older brother. The gameplay was fast and furious, and easy to get into. The hours melted away as we played countless games against each other into the night. We played so much *Ice Hockey* that my parents, later that year, surprised us with it as a "brother's gift," one I will never forget. —"The Immortal" John Hancock, YouTube personality

Insider Insight: I have played EA Sports' *NHL* series since the beginning. Hockey games are my jam and I am awesome at them. But my love of hockey games began years before with *Ice Hockey* on the NES. From passing, shooting, fighting, and energy, it had it all. It also trained me to be the gamer I am today.

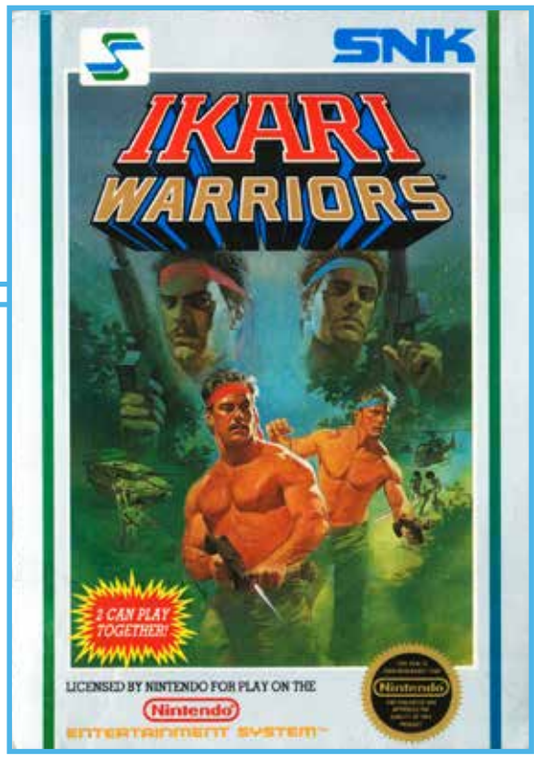
You see, my dad was a skilled gamer. He used to kick my butt in *Ice Hockey* just about every night. It didn't matter what combination of players I had—all enforcers, all snipers, all danglers—he owned me. But I kept coming back for more. Easily a year went by without me garnering a win, but I'll never forget the night I squeezed out a hard-fought 4–3 victory. He was pissed. After it was over he smiled and hugged me, but I knew what I did.

I went to school the next day and drew a picture of one of the sprites from the game and wrote: "I finally beat Dad!" It was like a paper version of the Stanley Cup for me. I had finally done it. Everyone in my family thought it was funny. It was on the fridge later that day but mysteriously disappeared by the next morning. My dad knew that his reign was over. A few years later on the Genesis our mashups continued, but he was never as dominant as he was in *Ice Hockey*. —Patrick Hickey Jr, author of *The Minds Behind the Games*, founder and editor in chief of ReviewFix.com



Ikari Warriors

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: Micronics
GAME TYPE: Run and Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1987



Thanks to unlimited continues and explosive two-player action *Ikari Warriors* is a fairly popular title for the NES, despite its flaws. The characters are slow, too much pink is incorporated into the graphics, and there are a number of glitches, including the possibility of getting stuck behind a barrier and having to restart. You, as Rambo-style hero Paul or Vince, must trudge through four overhead view levels of play (primarily jungles, but also water and enemy compounds), firing a machine gun and throwing hand grenades at soldiers, snipers, tanks, rock faces, and other enemies. For enhanced firepower you can occasionally hop into a tank (à la *Front Line*) or a helicopter.

When compared to the faster, more playable Tradewest arcade game (1986) the NES rendition lacks rotary control and forced scrolling, along with some graphical details. Still a fun two-player contest, though.

Memories: *Ikari Warriors* was one of the first games I bought for my NES because the arcade game was a truck ton of manliness. I especially enjoyed the two-player mode. While I acknowledged the obvious shortcomings of the NES version at first, I discovered its main flaw two or three hours into a two-player session. My brother-in-law and I were playing the game, and I got stuck at the bottom/left side of the screen behind a barrier; the game would no longer scroll forward. There was no way to blow myself up, or back up, or anything, so we had to hit reset. Such a bummer!

Notable Quotable:

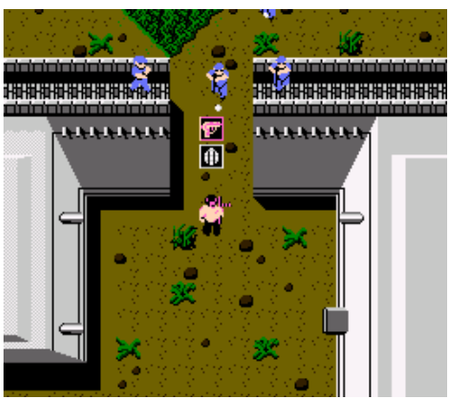
"A fine job converting this for Nintendo owners. There is an absolute fascination with this type of arcade game, and this one won't disappoint . . . The real fun is when you can play it with a friend . . .plenty of depth . . .fast arcade action at its best." —*Computer Entertainer* (June 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"This was a defining day for my brother and I, though I'm sure neither of us knew it then. When *Ikari Warriors* came out I went berserk for it, and having no income of my own I had to beg my brother Matt (12 years older than me) to go out and rent it, which he denied time and time again. We'd head to Mr. Movies in Minnesota, I'd see the box art, freak out, and he'd pick up something else. Finally we rented it, played co-op, and dominated the game, even leaving the NES on overnight . . . I was totally paranoid that I'd come back from school (or daycare or whatever) and the game would be turned off. Fast forward another 15 years or so and I spend my nights playing *Call of Duty 4* while he frequents games like *BlazBlue*. I guess some things never change, eh *Ikari Warriors*? – IGN Nintendo Editor Mark Bozon (via www.ign.com)

Notable Quotable:

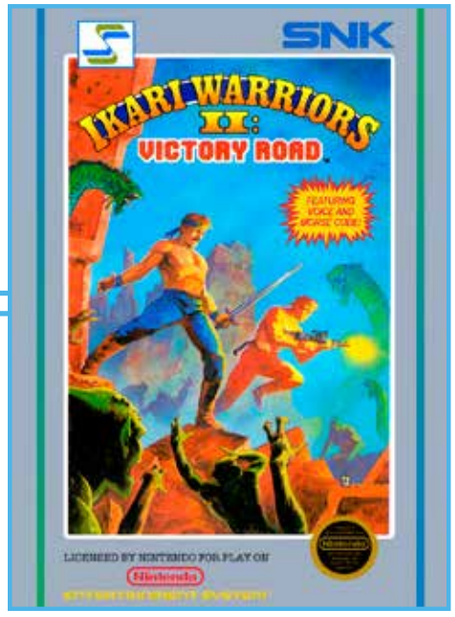
"The cooperative multiplayer capability was awesome, as was the ever-present search for vehicles to commandeer. Although not heaping in replay value, *Ikari Warriors* is still a great catch." —*Game Informer* (December 2001)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ikari Warriors II: Victory Road

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: Micronics
GAME TYPE: Run and Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



Ikari Warriors II begins where the original game left off, but goes off on a sci-fi/fantasy tangent. After rescuing the colonel from the original *Ikari Warriors*, Paul and Vince were trying to return home when they got zapped into the future, in which Zang Zip the War Dog has enslaved the people of Earth. Once again, Paul and Vince must mow down bad guys (aliens in this case) with machine guns and grenades, but they've added bazookas, boomerangs, and swords to their arsenal. In addition, they can use land mines to blast through walls and rocks, meaning players won't get stuck like in *Ikari Warriors* (NES version). Other new features include barshops, where players purchase thunder power, armor power, and other items; dark mirrors, which are used for warping to bosses or playing skeet shooting-style mini-games; and larger characters, meaning that Vince and Paul are bigger targets. In comparison to Tradewest's 1986 arcade game, which was simply called *Victory Road*, the NES port has less detailed graphics and far inferior voice effects. The coin-op game also benefited from rotary controls.

Notable Quotable:

"Gameplay is not as solid as, say, *Contra* . . .kind of glitchy, and your character is frustratingly slow. The scenarios are barren and poorly detailed; the enemies tend to appear out of nowhere and follow erratic patterns that make them feel more like a nuisance than actual opponents." —Daniel Castro (venturebat.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It has some new ideas implemented to keep it different from the arcade version (and actually make it feel more like a sequel than a rehash), but it's just implemented so horribly that the arcade version is actually preferable. This version breaks levels up into sections instead of just having one long continuous map. Ralf and Clark are allowed to hold onto weapons indefinitely, and any additional weapons they pick up add to the firepower . . .there are some new items, like wings that allow you to fly around fast or restore all of your life. Yes, the heroes have a life meter this time around, enabling them to take several hits before biting it. The green tiles sometimes lead to mini games that earn you 'hearts,' the game's currency. When killed enemies leave behind hearts, which look more like malformed ladybugs . . . The graphics are poor and the animation is choppy. The controls are off-kilter and sluggish, pretty much as they were in the NES *Ikari Warriors*." —Michael Plasket (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

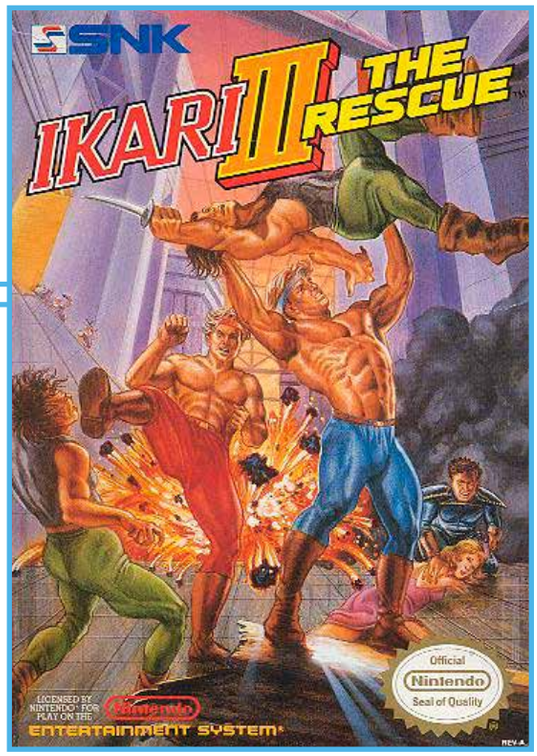
OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: The word "Ikari" is Japanese for "anger," meaning this game is essentially "Anger Warriors." If you've played it for more than 30 seconds you'll know it to be a fitting title, because *Ikari Warriors II: Victory Road* is quite difficult. My buddy Scott and I rented the game from the local mom and pop video store in 1988 for a weekend. Despite a bit of a learning curve we did pretty well. We also had the help of a sweet cheat code. So long as you mashed A, B, B, A before the Game Over screen appeared you could keep playing after being killed off. Even with the code, it's still a tricky romp.

We eventually managed to reach the final level. Our beefy heroes strode down Victory Road to the final boss encounter. Suddenly the game stripped us of all the cool weapons we had thus far accumulated and forced us into the final battle with nothing but swords! We had our trusty cheat code in our back pocket if we needed it. Into the fray we dove with swords swinging, but the boss made short work of us. A, B, B, A . . . A, B, B, A . . . A, B, B, A, A, B, B, A!!! Nothing. We mashed the buttons, but to no avail. Apparently the cheat code doesn't work during the final battle. Monday quickly came and we begrudgingly returned the rented cartridge. I sometimes wonder if the broken corpses of our angry warriors remain at the feet of our destructor. —Brian 'CIVICMINDED' Lesyk, co-host of the Pass The Controller gaming show

Ikari III: The Rescue

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Paul and Vince return in *Ikari III: The Rescue*, which is a port of Tradewest's 1989 arcade game. The duo must rescue the president's daughter Elise, who has been kidnapped by an organization bent on global domination called the Crime Ghost. The game unwisely removes most of the shooting action of the first games and replaces it with lots of punching and kicking (roundhouse kicks and jump kicks). Sometimes you can also pick up and throw enemies. Grenades and machine guns can be found, but ammo is severely limited. Other weapons to pick up include oil drums (which kill all onscreen enemies) and rocks. Once again there are a variety of soldiers to kill, but an underwater level where you fire harpoons adds scuba divers to the mix. Other enemies include ninjas, tanks, knife men, an armored train, and more. *Ikari Warriors III* has better animation, more detailed jungle scenery, and more realistic characters than the previous games in the series. All three feature a top-down perspective and unlimited continues (via codes Up, Right, A in this game and A, B, B, A in the first two).

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

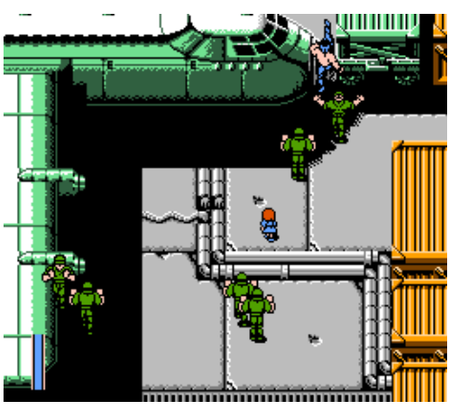
"The qualities I had come to love in the previous titles in the *Ikari* series were missing in *Ikari III*! The overhead fighting scenes are ridiculous compared to other emerging titles. The play mechanics in *Ikari II* were much better than this, so I guess I expected a little more . . .this cart seems lazy and misguided . . .the graphics are a little too choppy . . .gameplay is just as shaky." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"My biggest gripe is the terrible collision detection (punches don't always hit), and the randomness of the whole experience is frustrating. Some enemy soldiers have moves closer to ballet dancing than martial arts; they sometimes just fly across the screen and don't even bother trying to hit you, and some die in one punch, whereas others take forever, despite all your best efforts. But the game looks more than correct, the graphics are sharp and detailed, and the controls actually work (I wish you could move in eight directions though, and not four) . . .exclusive scuba diving level is probably the best part of the game . . . Although *Ikari III* is somewhat repetitive and flawed in places, it is the 'best' *Ikari* game for the system (well, the first two are plain awful)." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You can't attack diagonally. Punches seem much more effective than kicks, and the action is repetitive . . . I was hoping my soldier would acquire a permanent weapon somewhere along the line, but it never happened. The graphics are noticeably cleaner than previous *Ikari* games, with more lifelike characters that appear less pudgy. The awesome first stage looks spectacular with its green jungle scenery and sparkling blue water, but after that you have to forge through endless warehouse stages . . . *Ikari III*'s soundtrack is also lacklustre. Unlimited continues are provided, perhaps in response to the overwhelming difficulty of the previous games . . .my least favorite chapter of the trilogy." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



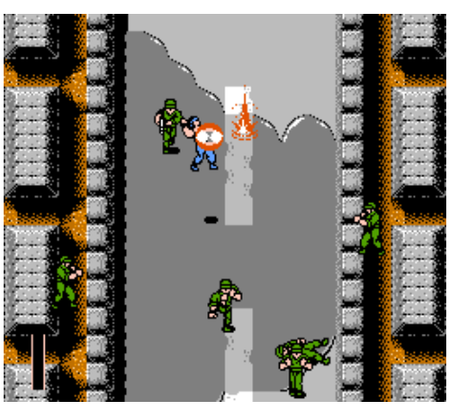


Image Fight

PUBLISHER: Irem
DEVELOPER: Irem
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

While it lacks the graphical depth, detail, and richness of coloring of Irem's 1988 arcade game, *Image Fight* for the NES is [illegible]ctly acceptable port. The action, though [illegible]ble, is standard for the genre, with players piloting an OF-1 Fighter ship up the screen, firing away at robots, cannons, alien ships, and other enemies (including Medusa) while avoiding their fire and various types of terrain (including walls). Whether flying over land, sea, or the enemy base, or through an elevator shaft or an abandoned mine, the view is from overhead. At any time players can toggle between four different flying speeds, which is a nice touch. Special weapons to pick up include shields, reflecting balls, seeking lasers, a five-way gun, drilling lasers, rippling lasers, a v-cannon, seeking missiles, and a side shooter.

Notable Quotable:

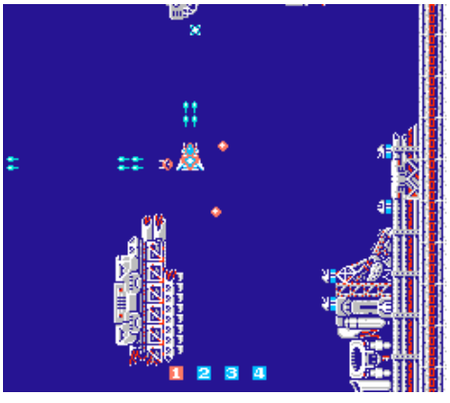
"I love the cartridge artwork on this. That's why I bought it . . . Interesting game. It's not the best game in the genre on the NES, but it's far from the worst. Kind of average, but still worth playing . . . Recommended if you like these super old-school spaceship shooters." —CGR Publishing (YouTube)

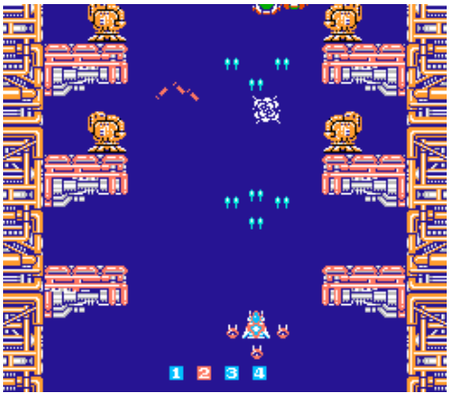
Notable Quotable:

"An unbelievably intense game for the NES. The action is non-stop, with a large number of levels! As you proceed the game remains challenging and visually different . . . What appears to be another 'me too' shooter is really a top of the line overhead blast-'em-up . . .difficult bosses . . . Lots to see and lots to shoot at." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"*Image Fight* was ported many times. The first was for the NES . . . Unfortunately, it's quite a poor effort . . .the sound and visuals are barely any better than something like *Zanac*, which was released four years prior . . . The sprites are incredibly small and lose all of the detail from the arcade game. The stages lose a lot of detail—in the later levels that take place in space there's not even a starry background; you just fly over blackness. Half of the weapons are gone, too. The upside is that there are less sprites on the screen so it's much easier . . . Faring much better is the PC Engine port released in the same year." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

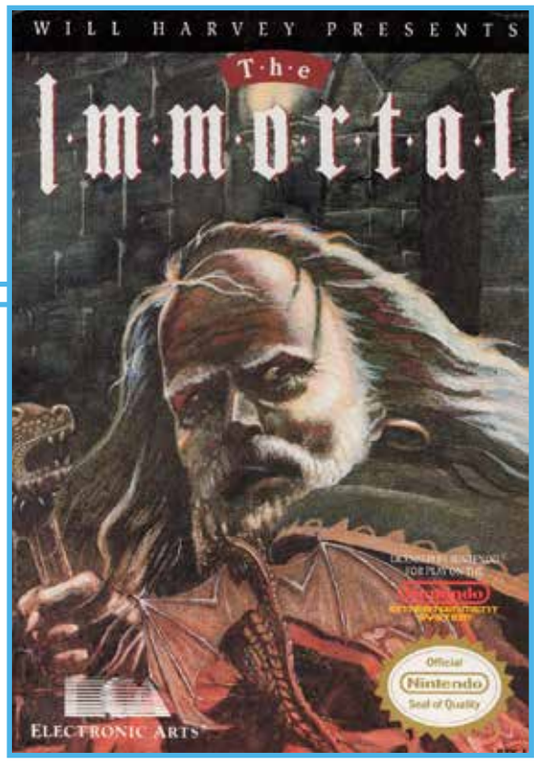


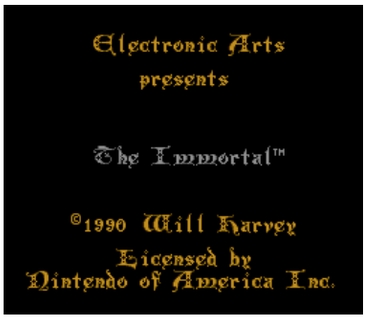


OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Immortal

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Sandcastle
GAME TYPE: Isometric Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1990





Based on Will Harvey's notoriously difficult computer game which debuted on the Apple II in 1990, *The Immortal* puts you in the role of a wizard on a quest to find your master, Mordamir. Armed with fireballs and a pack for carrying amulets, shrinking potions, and other items, you must brave a dark, dreary dungeon filled with spiders, bats, goblins, trolls, oozing slime, invisible creatures, pit traps, and other enemies and obstacles. Gameplay is largely trial and error, with you trying (again and again, inevitably) to use the right items at the right times and in the right places. You'll change form, fly on a magic carpet, paddle across water on a floating barrel, and much more, but if you use an item unwisely it could result in instant death. Monster battles, which are comprised of jabbing, slashing, and ducking right and left, switch the action to an up close perspective. You will definitely need those passwords for saving your progress through the six levels of the Labyrinth of Eternity.

Notable Quotable:

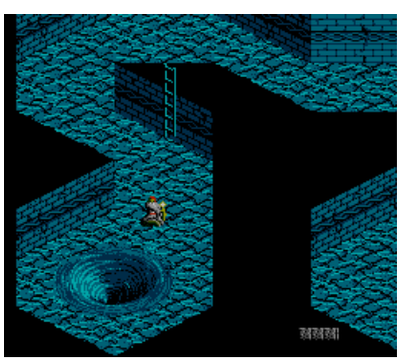
"The graphics are probably its weakest point. As you travel through this rather blocky dungeon, you'll see some creative looking enemies and objects, but not many. The sheer repetitive blandness of the game gets to you after a while . . .the in-battle graphics are a few notches higher and have some more impressive fight animations . . .the music is better than it is in the Sega port . . . Another strong point would be the storyline . . . If you're looking for a decent adventure game with a mix of mental and reflexive skill involved, you might want to give Will Harvey's *The Immortal* a go." —RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)

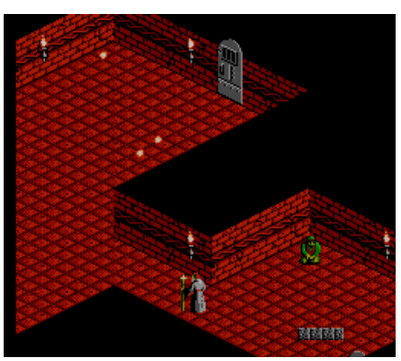
Insider Insight: I played *The Immortal* for the first time at my best friend's house when I was 10 or 11 years old. My friend had asked me one morning at school if I'd ever played it, and after informing him that I had not, he proceeded to tell me all about it. He emphasized the difficulty and the general gameplay, but as he described how amazing the graphics were and that he had read some magazine review hailing the game's visuals as the best on the NES I was skeptical, but my interest was piqued.

That afternoon, as we sat down in his basement, huddled around the TV, and switched the game on, I was blown away by what I saw. The character animations looked almost rotoscoped, like something found in *Prince of Persia* or *Karateka*, but in 3D-ish isometric perspective. The game actually looks better than its Sega Genesis and PC counterparts, with much better color theory applied to the graphics, despite the limited color palette of the NES hardware. The NES version is also blessed with the beautiful cover art of the original game, rather than the re-imagined design found on other ports. My initial impression of the game struck me hard and left me confounded. I just couldn't figure out how anyone could achieve that visual quality on the NES.

More than three decades later, with a career in game development and having actually worked on home brewing NES games, I still can't figure it out entirely. The game still looks every bit as impressive, and its difficulty is still every bit as brutally punishing. Now, all these years later, I still associate the game with one of my best friends and the fun we had on the NES. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Impossible Mission II

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Novotrade
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

Impossible Mission II is a largely faithful port of the 1988 Epyx computer game, putting you in the role of a twenty-fifth-century youth who must infiltrate the stronghold of mad genius Elvin Atombender within the six-story StarCom International Building. You must shutdown his mainframe computer, which has spread a nasty virus that could unleash nuclear Armageddon. Armed with a pocket computer, you will run, jump, duck, climb stairs, ride elevators, and search for various items, including time extender icons; security codes (for entering other rooms); safes (which contain musical key data sequences that must be recorded); and terminal commands (for turning on lights, setting bombs and mines, disengaging enemy droids, and resetting moving platforms). Like its predecessor (*Impossible Mission*, which didn't make it to the NES), the action is a mix of platforming and puzzle solving. *Impossible Mission II* was also released by SEI. Both versions are unlicensed and hard to find, and they play the same.

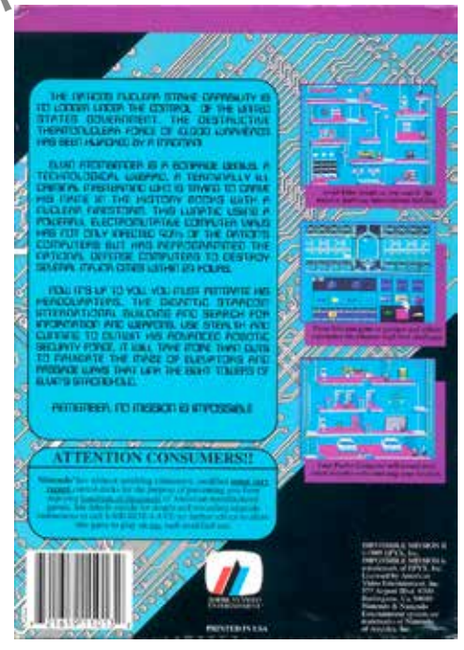
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

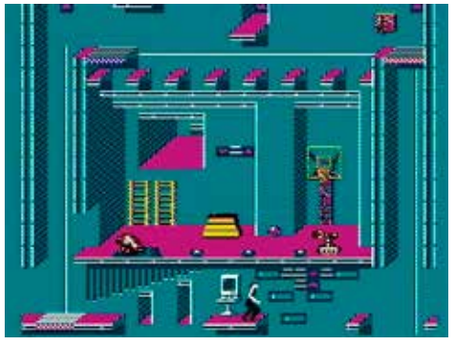
Notable Quotable:

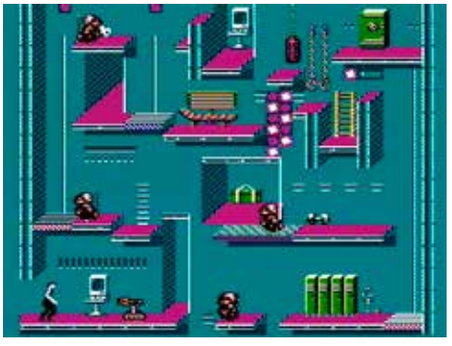
"The only saving grace of death is the fantastic sampled death scream. The idea of having to collect data and passcodes is interesting, but sadly the endless difficulty, added stress of a timer, and terrible controls let down what should have been a fun experience." —Jim Evans (*Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985-1995)*)

Notable Quotable:

"Should you choose not to accept this game, in truth, you won't be missing much. *Impossible Mission II* is too tedious to be of any merit. Every room is the same thing: search for items, either use said items in that room or move on to the next room. Watch your time. Repeat endlessly. That's it. If your main character didn't always move like he was in slow motion this game would be a breeze. His unwieldiness is the only reason for the game's difficulty, but don't worry, you have unlimited lives. I think dying lowers your time a little bit, so watch out for that. Or don't. I'd go with the latter." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

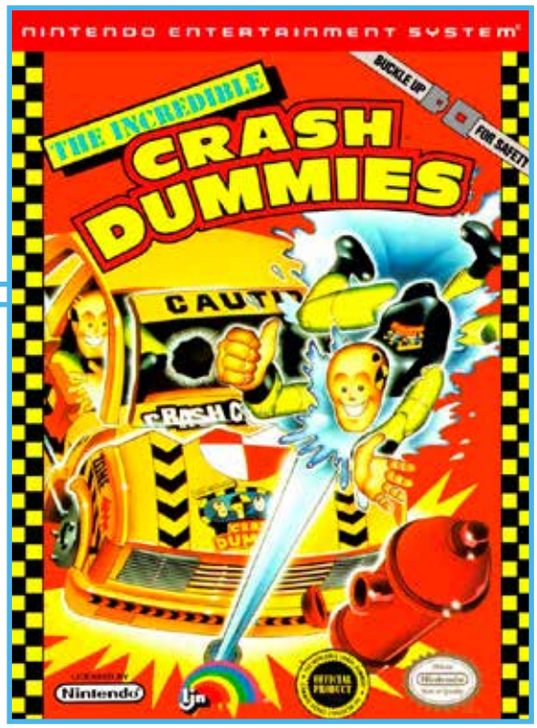






The Incredible Crash Dummies

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Software Creations
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1994



In the early '90s, Tyco created a toy line patterned after the government-sponsored public service advertising campaign featuring crash dummies employed in the testing of car safety. LJN's *The Incredible Crash Dummies* is based on those toys, putting players, as Slick or Spin (depending on the stage), through nine levels of action: The Crash Test Center, The Sewer, Inside the Big Top, The Fun House, The Warehouse, The Docks, Car Wreckers, The Junk Yard, and The Junk Man. Spin rolls along on a unicycle-like wheel, meaning his momentum-based control is a bit tricky, while Slick is a more typical platform protagonist, running on his feet. The dummies use a default exhaust gun weapon for stunning creatures, junkbots, and other enemies, and an oil gun for killing them. They can grab steering wheels for invincibility, balloons for jumping farther, and rockets for speeding up. There's an armpower-up as well. As you proceed through the game, you'll bounce on rubber tires to high areas, jump on bubbles that rise through the air, collect traffic safety cones (for extra lives), dodge bowling pins and bouncing beach balls, jump over projectiles and gaps, dodge bombs dropped by birds and falling sacks of grain, and more. Grabbing dummy heads restores health and returns gameplay to proper directional control (the latter after you've lost your head). The game, in which the objective is to rescue crash test dummies Spare Tire, Darryl, and Bumper from the evil Junkman, was released late in the life of the NES and is hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"*Crash Dummies* represents everything awful about licensed deals." —Brett Elston (www.gamesradar.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics in this game won't pass any crash tests. They're dark and average. Some of the sprites even fade in and out. As for the sound, it's unobtrusive and keeps you walking or rolling along . . .an average game for average players . . .the Crash Dummies are more entertaining in Driver's Ed movies." —*GamePro* (May 1993)

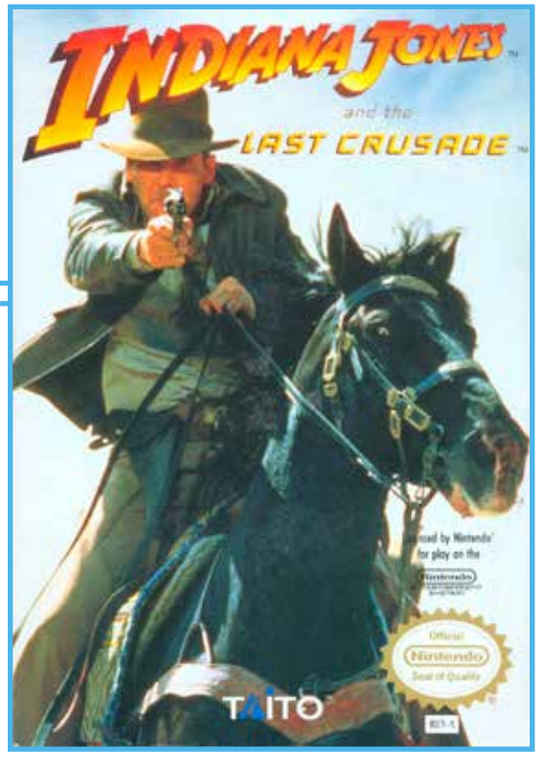
Insider Insight: I remember commercials with Vince and Larry, the crash test dummies, demonstrating proper seat belt use. I don't know why it caught my interest, but I became obsessed with human injury simulators. I could rip off the limbs and heads of the Tyco Spin and Slick dolls and reattach them with Velcro as many times as I'd like. I could smash plastic Crash Cars into the Test Center wall and strap dummies into the Crash n' Bash Chair, watching them spring apart into pieces. I could even flatten Hubcat and Bumper the dog with the Crash Cycle while listening to Crash Test Dummies the band.

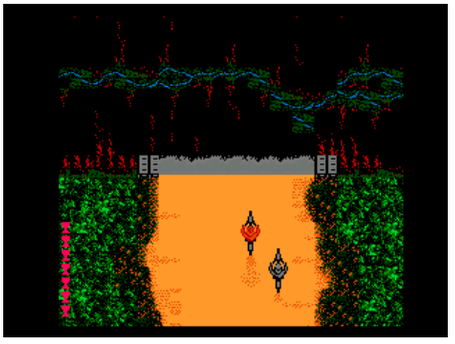
How could I not like *The Incredible Crash Dummies* video game? Well, let me tell you. The goal of the game is to avoid crashing. I mean, the fun of dummies is their eyeballs pop out and their heads comically boing off their bodies, but after a good laugh they're back in the driver's seat, ready for another adventure. Except in the NES game. For some reason they're dodging bouncing tires, sewer rats, bombs on parachutes, birds dropping bombs . . .wait, what am I even trying to accomplish? And why is the music piercing my ear drums? I played the game all the way through, hoping I would eventually reach a driving level or boss battle that would allow me to literally tear Junkman's head off. How dissatisfying to crush him with a weight! At least, at the end, I got to propel the friend I was trying to save full force through a brick wall. I've still got the sweet action playset, but the NES cartridge did not survive the crash test of time. —Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (Taito)

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Software Creations
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1991





The Taito version of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, which is based on the third film in the popular series, is divided into several distinctive genres, each preceded by a cutscene that lets players decide what to do next, such as get cross, rescue Dad, or find Marcus. In The Cross of Coronado and Castle Brunwald, Indy runs, jumps, ducks, climbs ladders or stairs, and punches, kicks, and whips bad guys. In the jigsaw puzzle like Catacombs of Venice, players must reassemble scattered pieces of the Grail. In The Desert of Iskenderun, Indy battles enemy soldiers atop a tank while trying not to fall off. Viewed from overhead, The Road to Berlin has Indy driving a motorcycle up the screen, whipping, bumping, or jumping on enemies while avoiding mine fields, washed-out bridges, and machine gun nests. Also viewed from overhead, The Lost Temple finds Indy walking around a path of letters, spelling out "Jehovah" as he goes. More common than the Ubisoft version, but still hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

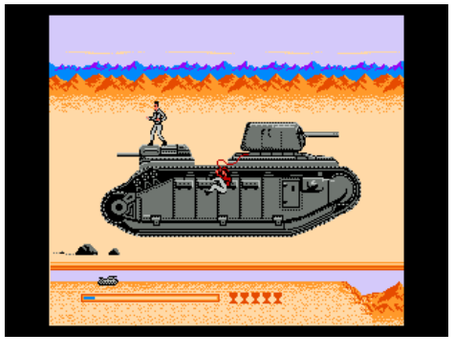
"Unlike some movie adaptations, this game is more of a series of arcade style games than it is a complete adventure." —*Nintendo Power* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Good music, decent graphics, nice cutscenes, and a branching storyline that closely follows the movie. The only thing missing is actual gameplay. Although you get to ride on a motorcycle, solve puzzles, explore castles, and beat up thugs, each of these concepts is poorly handled. Indy moves at a snail's pace in the platforming levels and fighting is much more difficult than it should be." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

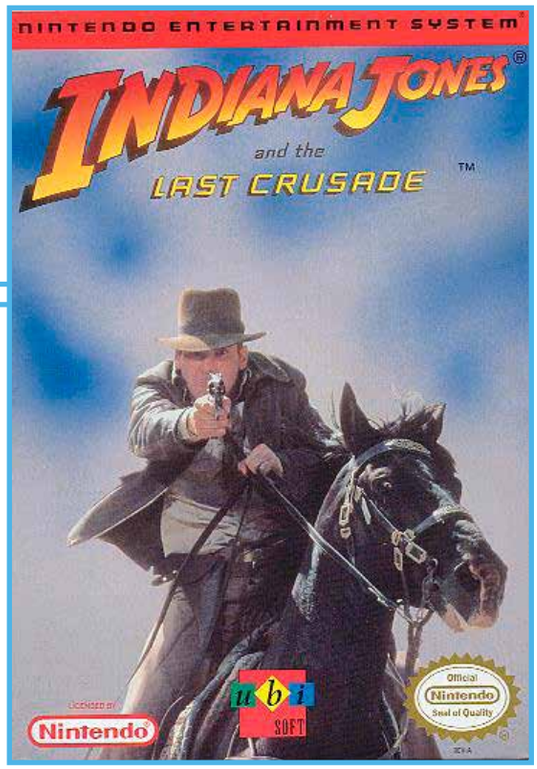
"Like watching the movie unfold. The graphics are great, with buckets of color on both the action and intermission screens, and the sprites whizz around the screen at a great rate of knots. The main tune is a very nice rendition of the title theme, and there's lots of nicely done spot FX thrown in for good measure. Indy walks and runs around like a thing possessed, punching, jumping, kicking, and whipping, and is very well animated indeed, as are all the sprites. The game is so involved, but allows you to skip around certain parts of the game, so you can dictate how the difficulty curve escalates! Quite frankly, this has got to be one of the best Nintendo games to date, and you'd have to be an utter pillock or someone who absolutely hates Harrison Ford to miss it." —*Computer and Video Games* (December 1990)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (Ubisoft)

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: NMS Software
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



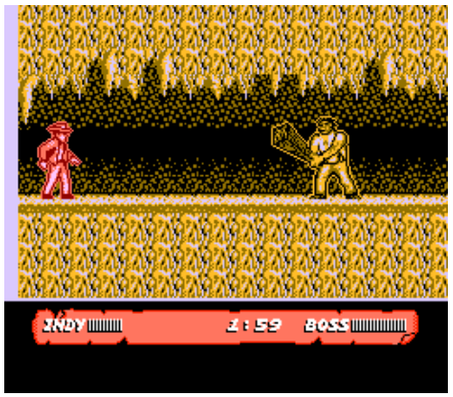
Based on Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), this second of two NES cartridges inspired by that film. You play the title role of the popular adventurer, who must rescue his father and find the Holy Grail. Armed with his fists and the ability to run and jump, Indy must battle his way through six levels: Exploring the Caves, Escaping on the Train, Entering the Catacombs, Assault on Brunwald Castle, Escape from the Airship, and The Three Trials. Indy can also climb ropes and ladders and duck under enemy attacks, such as arrows. To add to his arsenal Indy can grab a whip (beginning in level two) and a gun (beginning in level four). Enemies and obstacles include rats, giraffes, armed men, Indians, knives, bullets, circular saws, fireballs, and more. Neither NES *Last Crusade* game lives up to the film, but this version, which is hard to find, is particularly bad, thanks to short-range punching, poor controls, and Game Boy-like graphics.

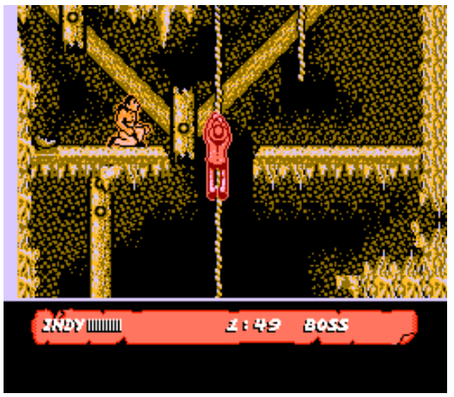
Notable Quotable:
"Indy isn't the dashing character we remember. Instead, he plods along, getting beaten up or shot by everyone he meets. He doesn't always respond well to the controls . . .poor graphics . . . For instance, in the Circus Train level, the wheels turn on the train, but the landscape doesn't roll by in the background . . . At least the sprites are large and easy to identity, though their movements are jerky . . .simple sounds . . . The lively theme music is D.O.A. with this weak one-dimensional treatment." —*GamePro* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"This is definitely the most hideous game I've seen on the NES. Indy looks even goofier than he did in *Temple of Doom*, if that's at all possible. The film provides for plenty of interesting stage ideas, but this shoddy game even makes jumping the cars on a circus train seem dull! The first stage, entitled Exploring the Caves, is about as unimaginative as you can get, with all the obligatory cheap hits, including falling stalactites. It's hard to grab onto ropes, and fights with bad guys amount to trading punches until somebody falls over. The controls are so stiff that I might as well be controlling C3PO. *Last Crusade* is one truly pathetic piece of trash." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The game has noticeably poor graphics, especially for a pretty late NES title, as well as some other clunkiness . . . Overall, when it comes to both *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* games, the Taito version is usually considered much better, and I think it is in a lot of regards, but even that game is extremely flawed and not a whole lot of fun to play. In fact, if I have a chance to play either one, I'm going to pick this one just because I find it a little less frustrating." —Cornshaq (YouTube)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

PUBLISHER: Tengen/Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Tengen
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1988

With *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* for the NES, fans of the 1985 film get to play the role of their favorite whip-wielding adventurer. Indy's mission is to free enslaved children working in mines, which involves exploring caves, climbing ladders, sliding down chutes, walking on conveyor belts, riding mine carts, swinging across gaps, and more. Freed slaves award players with keys, jewels, map pieces, hats (extra lives), arrows pointing to secret doors, and weapons, including swords, guns, and TNT. There are 12 levels of play, each filled with such enemies and obstacles as rats, snakes, spikes, spiders, lava monsters, guards, and/or boulders. *Temple of Doom* is based on Atari's 1985 arcade game, which had digitized voice effects and superior graphics (conversely, the NES version added jumping and more items to the formula). The original Tengen release is unlicensed, but Mindscape published an official (though identical) rendition later the same year.

Notable Quotable:

"Hardly the best Indy game out there. The game control is loose and sloppy, the color scheme will make your eyes sting after only fifteen minutes of gameplay, the levels are repetitive and too numerous, Indy looks like he's wearing a medical intern's dirty coveralls . . . The only saving grace to the game is a respectable attempt to preserve John Williams' musical score." —TheRaider.net

Notable Quotable:

"The first level of the game is quite easy to master, but the going immediately gets a whole lot tougher from the second level on. Indiana Jones fans will appreciate the close adherence to the movie's story and the use of the familiar theme music throughout. The game is very challenging and enjoyable to play, even though we found the graphics to be a little flat." —*Computer Entertainer* (February 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The film *Temple of Doom* is generally considered the weakest of the original Indiana Jones trilogy, but as a game adaptation, I'm happy to report that *Temple of Doom* is, hands down, the best of the three Indy NES games. It has a ramshackle, devil-may-care spirit to it that is far superior to the sludgy, murky qualities of the two *Last Crusade* games. I wouldn't call it a *good* game necessarily, but it is a game that does whatever the hell it wants and, surprisingly, succeeds on its own terms. – Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Insider Insight: Like many kids who grew up during the '80s I was a huge fan of the *Indiana Jones* films, and *Temple of Doom* was (and still is) my favorite. Somehow the Atari arcade game passed me by back in the day, which I still find strange, given its popularity, but as soon as I learned that there were home conversions I couldn't wait to try them out. When I first got hold of the ZX Spectrum port, which I borrowed from my friend Neil, I was super excited to try it out, despite him telling me it "isn't all that."

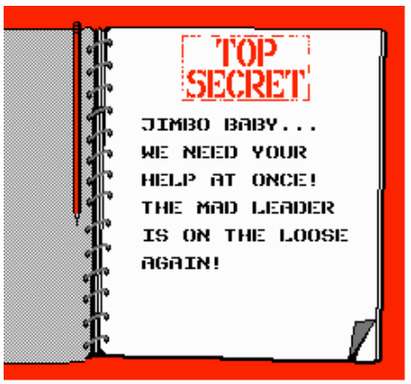
Sadly, his words were true, and rarely have I been so disappointed in a video game. Later on I got hold of the Atari ST conversion, which was 16-bit, so it must be better, right? No, sadly not. There were some upgrades to the graphics and sound, but it was still a pretty tedious game. More time passed before I got to play the NES port. Given it was actually by Atari Games themselves (under their Tengen label) it must be the ultimate version, right?

It was time to give up on my *Indiana Jones* hopes, as not even the NES port could provide the goods. The horribly garish graphics and droning sound didn't help matters—you'll need to wear sunglasses to play this one! Then I did finally get to play the original arcade cabinet at a gaming expo (don't know why I didn't just try it out on MAME!) a few years back and discovered that it wasn't that good of a game in the first place. However, it did have some cool features like the digitized speech, so there is that, and it was a lot better than the home conversions. All that Indy excitement for nothing, eh? —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Infiltrator

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Chris Gray Enterprises
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator/Stealth, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Adapted from *Infiltrator* and *Infiltrator II* for the Commodore 64, *Infiltrator* for the NES puts players in the role of Jimbo-Baby McGibbits, who must infiltrate the headquarters of the Mad Leader. Jimbo starts off in his DHX-3 Attack Chopper, which he must fly to a secret enemy base. The action is viewed from inside the cockpit, with players firing 20 mm cannons and heat seeking missiles at enemy fighters. The chopper sections are complex, as numerous factors must be considered, including speed, engine damage, battery heat, fuel, altitude, RPMs, chaff (metal strips that are dropped to fool radar guided missiles), flares, radio, turbo engines, whisper mode (fly and land silently), messages, altimeter, defenses, and more. Once a base is reached, players must undertake timed ground missions that involve such activities as unlocking doors, searching buildings, wearing disguises, avoiding capture by enemy guards, and using such inventory items as sleeping gas, gas grenades, identification papers, a mine detector, and explosives.

Notable Quotable:

"While the flight portions are solid, and the stealth missions are intriguing, there's a lack of complexity to both components. The basic objectives of every mission are the same, and the tasks needed to complete them get repetitive. On the plus side, the graphics are attractive and the game is more ambitious than most NES titles." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Infiltrator* is one of those games that, growing up, I kept going back to, over and over, even though I would have never called it one of my favorites, or even cited it as a really great game. I cannot quite put my finger on it, but it has this unique element where it is obvious (with the different play modes: helicopter piloting including communications interface, overhead stealth travel, and intense indoors espionage) that it could have been a great game, yet something is missing. Perhaps my inability to figure out what is missing reflects that of the developers: I feel like there is one ingredient that, if they had included it, would have genuinely lifted this NES video game into the upper echelons." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

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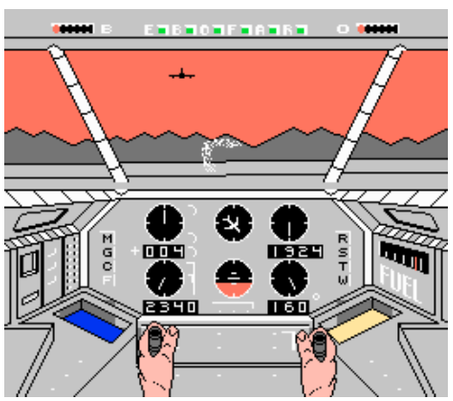
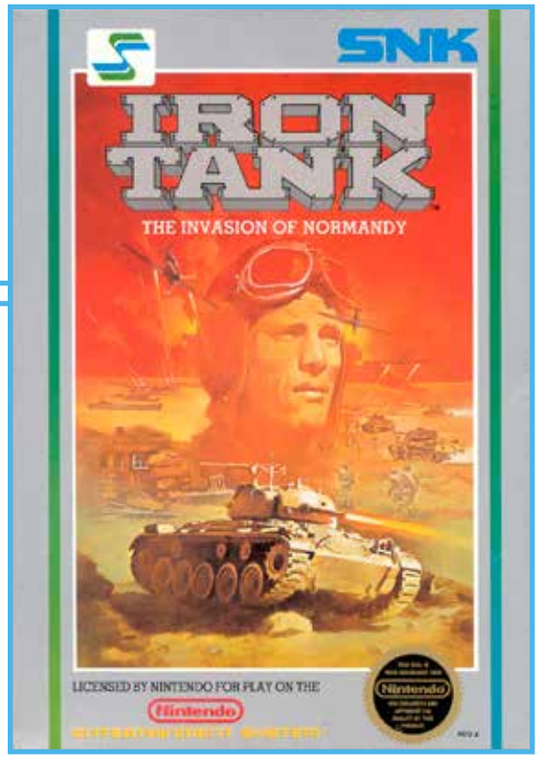


Iron Tank: The Invasion of Normandy

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Tank Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1988



SNK BRINGS YOU BATTLES, INVASIONS, STRIFE, COMBAT, SKIRMISHES, SEIGES, CONFLICTS, AIR RAIDS, MOBILIZATIONS, HOSTILITIES, AND ALL-OUT WARFARE!
IRON TANK

Iron Tank: The Invasion of Normandy is set during World War II, circa 1944. The game finds the United Forces looking [illegible] an advantage in their mission to establish a beachhead, break through the front lines, and infiltrate and destroy enemy headquarters. Enter Paul, a special forces veteran (played by you) who must pilot the titular tank up 19 top-down areas, firing away at foot soldiers, grenadiers, tanks, trains, gunboats, fighter planes, fortified bases, and other enemies. The Iron Tank is upgradeable with armor-piercing bullets, long range fire, rapid fire, full-screen bombs, and increased explosive power (selectable via a sub screen), and you can point the sturdy vehicle's turret in eight directions. Some may find the action to be a tad on the sluggish side, but the slow, steady pace is typical (and, at least in this case, desirable) for a tank shooter. Multiple pathways and substantial challenges ensure solid replay value. The game is similar to *Vindicators*, but with no keys or fuel to concern yourself with.

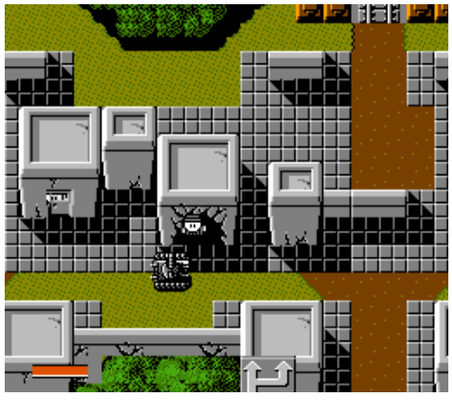
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

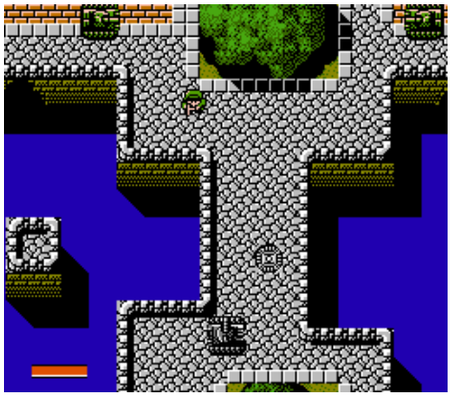
Notable Quotable:

"A great little tank game . . . The graphics are sharp and clear, and the army colors of the environment and vehicles do a great job creating a sense of warfare. The music and sound effects are nothing out of the extraordinary, but are decent, too . . . The controls are tight, though you might have a little problem aiming decently. The cannon stays focused in a fixed direction between firing. This can be helpful when you're driving in another direction than you want to shoot, but many times it's a problem, because it's a little hard to get the cannon in the right direction rapidly—and that's really needed when a lot of enemies appear on screen." —Tom Lenting (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

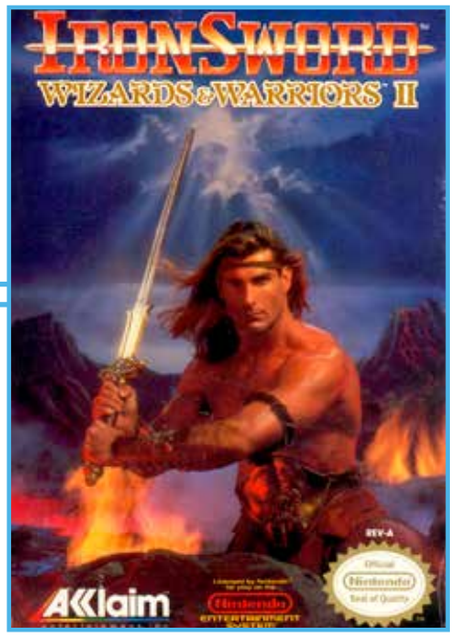
"Deserves more recognition than it's gotten . . . Controls are often a weak point in games featuring tanks. Not so in *Iron Tank*. Your tank features an aimable turret, which allows you to move and aim independently . . . This takes a little getting used to, but is very effective, and you can be quite nimble with practice. Being able to aim to the side or diagonal and strafe is an important tactic and makes the game more realistic and more fun . . . huge variety of tile-based backgrounds . . .these are a little rough in spots, though never truly bad, and the variety makes up for it . . . The music in *Iron Tank* is really first rate. It is heroic and epic, evokes both the military marches and the WWII era, adds drama and tension, and provides cues to when more challenging areas are up ahead . . . While mainly an action game, the story elements provided by the radio communiques and the configurable power-ups give an element of strategy almost like a proto-RPG. It's one of my favorite lesser known games on the NES." —Chris Sanyk (csanyk.com)





IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Zippo Games
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1989



The evil wizard Malkil has returned to the land of Sindarin and he's more powerful than ever, unleashing his fury in the form of four elementals: Earth, Wind, Water, and Fire. As the muscle-bound Kuros you must reconstruct the Iron Sword, the only weapon Malkil fears. The sequel to *Wizards & Warriors*, *IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II* has you exploring dark caverns and hazardous terrain, discovering hidden treasures and magic spells as you go. The game adds a few new elements to the enemy-stabbing, platform-jumping action, including a gambling mini-game and shops where you can purchase keys, food, armor, and magic spells, the last of which enable you to gain speed, become invisible, turn enemies into food or coins, and more. Spells are especially useful against the aforementioned elementals, which are also new to the series. The box for the game sports a painting of muscle-bound model Fabio, making the game a potential collector's item for romance novel enthusiasts. Followed by *Wizards & Warriors III, Kuros: Visions of Power*.

Notable Quotable:

"I liked *IronSword* a lot! Even though the game requires the same precise jumps that I hated from the original, *IronSword* is so big, and has so much to offer, most of the competition pales by comparison. Absolutely fantastic graphics and heaps of action make *IronSword* a must-have!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"An above average effort that lacks the edge in playability to make it a real classic . . . It's certainly challenging enough, but as time passes frustration has a nasty tendency to set in, making you want to turn off the machine and play something else. The audio-visual aspect is a little disappointing." —*Computer and Video Games* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Better graphics than the original *Wizards & Warriors* . . . The game's strongest selling point is its diversity . . .numerous exciting scenes. Whereas *Wizards* featured predominantly black backgrounds, *IronSword* dazzles the eye with a medley of colorful visuals . . .a sequel that is actually superior to its predecessor." —*Game Players* (October 1989)

OSCHEER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: I had played the original *Wizards & Warriors* at a friend's house and thoroughly enjoyed it. It was fun, the graphics were colorful, and it was just difficult enough to make me want to keep trying to beat it. But I didn't have an NES of my own to play it on, so I never had a chance to do so.

Flash forward to Christmas 1989. My brother and I received an NES as a joint gift from my parents and grandparents. The following day we were taken to Toys 'R Us to pick out one game each. My brother chose *Dragon Spirit* and I chose *IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II*, due to my fondness of the first game (and my mother approved since Fabio was on the cover).

Once it was my turn to play the NES that day I popped in *IronSword* and gave it a go. The first words that came out of my mouth were "What the hell is this?!" as it was nothing like the first game. Sure, it looked similar and sounded like the same dude composed the music for it (David Wise is a genius), but enemies swarmed around you with every step, and I couldn't progress more than a few yards without being straight up murdered and I'd have to start all over again. It was a painful experience. I was not happy.

I didn't receive new NES games very often so my brother and I had to make do with what we had, regardless if the game was good or bad. So even though I disliked *IronSword*, I played it constantly, because my only other options were playing *Super Mario Bros.* for the one-millionth time or my brother's copy of *Dragon Spirit*, which we both hated.

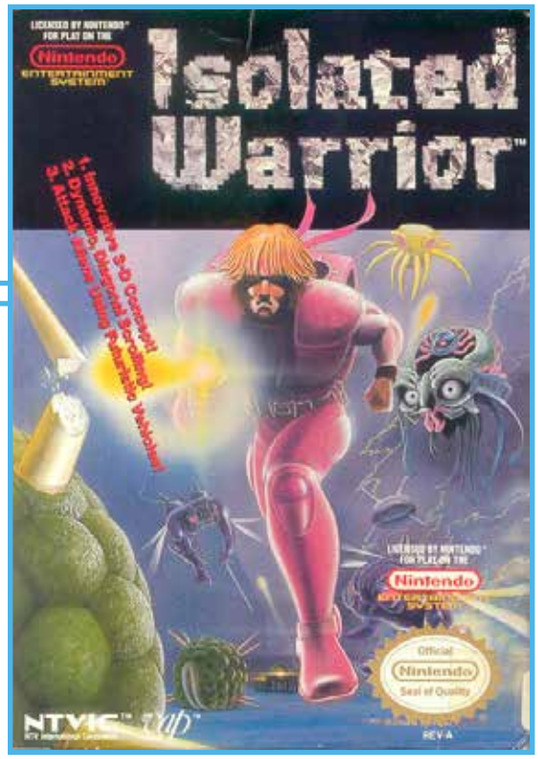
Eventually I learned that *IronSword* required a lot of patience and memorization (and a lot of luck) to play properly. You had to know exactly where those enemies would come from to progress, where each item is located, and the quickest way to get to them without taking any damage, and knowing when to take a leap of faith or just wait for a moving platform—it took work to play this game.

But once you know what is going on and how to make it through each level the game becomes very rewarding, and I had ultimate bragging rights once I finally completed the game a year later. A WHOLE YEAR! Every one of my friends owned this game (I suspect that their mothers also saw Fabio on the cover and bought it for their kids as much as they did for themselves), and I think only one of them beat it other than me. It was like being in a secret club. It was great.

Due to this game requiring such dedication on my part I grew to like Rare as a developer. They remain my favorite developer to this day. One of my collecting goals is to own every game made by them for US home consoles. And when I got back into collecting in 2013, the first game of theirs I purchased was, you guessed it, *IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II*. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker and Gamer

Isolated Warrior

PUBLISHER: NTVIC
DEVELOPER: KID
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



In this testosterone infused shooter players, as the heavily armored Max Maverick, walk, motorbike, and even ride a hovercraft through seven lengthy levels of explosive, [illegible]tric viewpoint action, using beams and bombs to thwart an alien invasion. Weapon power-ups and helpful items, such as spread beam, increased focus beam, more destructive bombs, and a protective barrier are plentiful, as are enemies, so there's no shortage of intense shooting action to be had. Acid pools, rocks, gun emplacements, destroyed buildings, and gaps to leap over are commonplace as well, making for a harrowing trek. In terms of audio/visuals the game is spectacular, boasting a robust electronic musical score, rich coloring, and a nice assortment of highly detailed, sci-fi movie style aliens. Some enemies are stationary on the ground, some fly in looping patterns, some hover nearby, and some head straight for you. The fact that the graphics flicker when there are too many enemies onscreen can be forgiven, as can the slowdown, which rears its ugly head when you are battling some of the more elaborate bosses, such as an alien head with a snake-like neck.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"Some of the levels drag on a bit, but the graphics are pretty hot (if a little flickery) and the gameplay is frantic!" – *Total!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"*Isolated Warrior* has a few original concepts. Good graphics and a variety of power-ups keep the game interesting. If you keep your weapon at full power the game is easily finished, though. Cool bosses and background effects! Too much slowdown and flicker in intense areas." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1991)

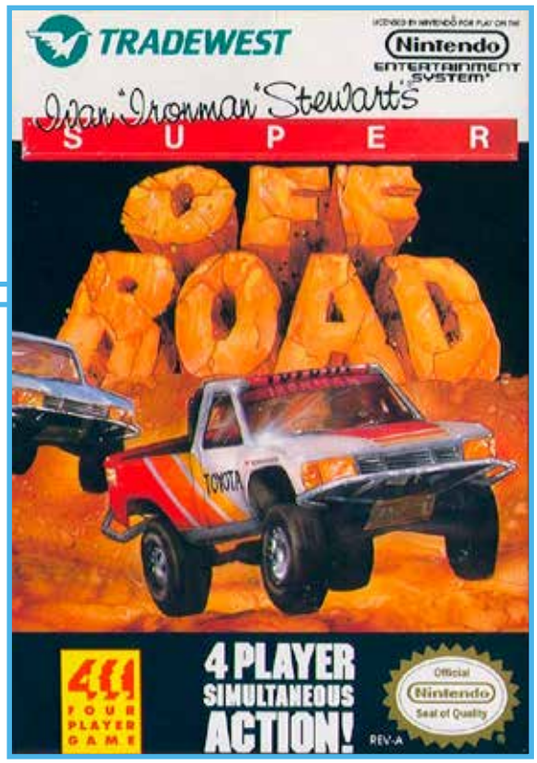
Notable Quotable:
"The unusual *Zaxxon*-style 3D angle, the fast and furious scrolling, and the sheer amount of bad guys to blow into the middle of next week make this an engrossing and entertaining shoot-'em-up. The action is well addictive, and there's plenty of variety from level to level to stop you from getting bored. The only negative point is that the difficulty level isn't particularly high" – *Mean Machines* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"This game is a real sleeper and has received little press in the game magazines. Until you discover the secret power-up zones *Isolated Warrior* may seem like just another frustrating shooter. Once you find them, however, the game takes on a whole new dimension . . . Good music and sound effects, solid graphics and animation, and constant action." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A fun action game that is just different enough from the competition…If you can get past the mediocre graphics, you might actually be the one person that can save this planet from alien attackers." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Rally/Off-Road Racing, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



A terrific port of Leland's 1989 arcade game, *Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road* for the NES one-ups the coin-op cla[illegible]llowing four-player action (compared [illegible]). The arcade game benefits from steering wheel control and somewhat sharper graphics, but Nintendo fans should be pleased with this fine off-road racer. Viewed from an overhead/angled perspective, the game has players racing their truck around eight different non-scrolling dirt tracks, turning sharp corners, driving over bumps and hills, dodging puddles and mud holes, and avoiding barriers and other trucks. Winning races grants players money for upgrading their trucks with nitro speed boosts and better tires, shocks, acceleration, and top speed. Nitros and money can also be picked up along the tracks. After races beautiful, big-breasted women congratulate the winners. Fans of this game will also want to check out *Super Off Road: The Baja*, which you can read about in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 2 (N–Z)*.

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics capture the coin-op almost perfectly with the minimum of flicker, and the gameplay's pretty decent as well, particularly in two-player mode . . .a tad on the slow side . . .the nitros aren't quite as effective as they should be . . .still a fine racer." —*Mean Machines* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Quite a lot of the animation on the trucks has been sacrificed, and the trucks don't quite handle as well as they might. Also, the nitros seem a bit weedy compared to the coin-op. Still, there's a decided lack of quality *Super Sprint* racers on the Nintendo and *Super Off Road* fits the bill quite nicely." —*Computer and Video Games* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The tracks are a lot bigger and tougher than any of the 16-bit versions of the game so don't expect an easy ride. The only problem is that the responsiveness of the trucks is very poor. This is not helped by the snail's pace at which your truck starts. Good, but not as addictive as *Super Sprint* . . . Between race screens are overly blocky. Huge, detailed tracks . . .hillbilly soundtrack for each track . . .too easy . . . Great fun for four players." —*Raze* (June 1991)

Insider Insight: While my favorite arcade ports on the NES tend to fall into the "better than the original" category with stuff along the lines of *Blades of Steel*, *Bionic Commando*, and—dare I say it—*Double Dragon*, the flawed but fun *Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off-Road* holds a spot on the list.

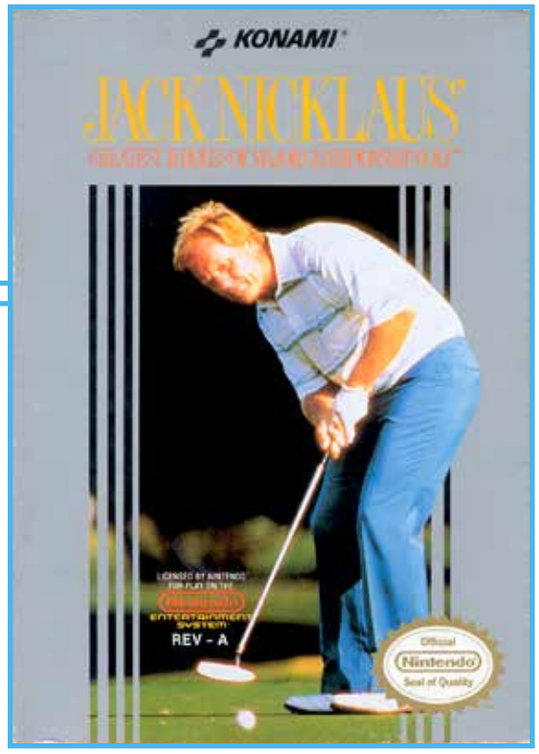
When I was a kid, we took multiple trips every summer to Prince Edward Island, which could only be accessed by ferry. If we were lucky we got on the "big boat," which included an arcade complete with *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Hard Drivin'*, and *Super Off-Road*. My brother and I would chew through quarters like crazy on all of those machines.

Super Off Road on the NES isn't super impressive, but it plays pretty well, and includes most of the tracks and features that made me fall in love with the arcade machine. Sometimes "good enough" is good enough. —Greg Sewart, former *EGM* Previews Editor, Producer of Generation 16, Host of Player One Podcast

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Jack Nicklaus' Greatest 18 Holes of Major Championship Golf

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1990



A disappointing Konami-published game, *Jack Nicklaus' Greatest 18 Holes of Major Championship Golf* is a tra[illegible] of Accolade's 1988 computer game. It features the Golden Bear's dream golf course, which includes such hot spots as #8 at Pebble Beach, #13 at Augusta, and #12 at Royal Lythum. Nicklaus himself is a playable character, along with seven fictional golfers of varying skills. Unlike certain computer versions of the game, Castle Pines Golf Club and the Golf Club at Desert Mountain are not included. You can't put backspin on the ball, but the game does have a lot of features, including club selection, multiple viewpoints, hazards (trees, water, roughs, wind, and sand), hooking, slicing, a three-tap swing system, a driving range, practice modes, and a Skins game, where each hole is worth a certain dollar value. In real life many consider Jack Nicklaus to be the greatest golfer of all time, as he won a record 18 major championships.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"There is very little challenge in the game, even on the expert level. Plus, it takes so long to update the screen between shots that the game soon gets very boring. With more than one human player, though, it starts to become a lot more fun, even better in a Skins game, with the pressure mounting at the same rate as the prize money." —*Raze* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The 3D course display (as well as being ugly and slow to draw) is pointless because it gives very little idea of how far away the course features actually are . . . The worst game of its type seen for a very long time! The graphics are blocky and incredibly unconvincing . . .the actual play area is also a bit on the small side. The sound is similarly dire too, though there's some sampled sound that (very) occasionally makes an appearance." —*Mean Machines* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are very well done . . .every time you hit the ball the screen redraws to show the new scene, which takes a good seven or eight seconds . . .after a while it really gets on your nerves . . .there's only so much fun you can get out of playing the same course over and over again . . .with a friend or two [the game] is quite good fun . . .the game's major drawback is the inaccuracy on the short shots, like pitching and putting . . .an average golf simulation with good and bad points." —*Total!* (April 1992)

Jackal

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988

Although the original game has sharper graphics and more explosive sound effects, Konami did a very nice job of bringing *Jackal*, their awesome 1986 arcade game, to the NES. Dozens of American prisoners of war remain on enemy soil, and it is up to the player—a Green Beret at the wheel of a [illegible] terrain, super-mobile attack jeep—to free them. After parachuting down to the Cambodian border, players must drive around six hostile territories, shooting tanks, cannons, light infantry, mobile missile launchers, troop transports, sniper rafts, shark attack submarines, and other enemies. To rescue POWs, players must destroy the barracks where they are being held, pick up said prisoners, and drive them to the heliport. The jeep, which can drive in all directions, is armed with a machine gun that can only fire straight up the screen. Players can also throw hand grenades and fire bazookas, the latter of which are obtained by rescuing POWs and powering up. Highly recommended.

Notable Quotable:
"*Jackal* is a top-tier NES title that plays and controls smoothly while having an ideal difficulty progression. Couple that with the exquisite level design and you're left with a hugely entertaining game that's non-stop fun whether you're playing alone or with a friend." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreviews.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"While I call this game a *Commando* clone with vehicles, the game has its own charm that makes me come back and play it now and again . . . The jeep handles well, and you can usually dodge enemy fire if you are quick enough . . . The player and enemy sprites look good, while the stage graphics look decent and get the job done . . .music is very good . . .sound effects are passable." —The Gamer's Library (www.thegamers-library.com)

Notable Quotable:
"At some point in the latter half of the 1980s, Konami's instantly recognizable, silver-framed package art became a surefire visual indicator of a top-notch NES experience. Those that picked up *Jackal* merely due to its similarity in appearance to games like *Contra* and *Castlevania* were not disappointed. *Jackal*'s premise is that the resolution to all conflict lies in explosions—lots and lots of explosions . . . The key to *Jackal*'s success, like so many other games on this list, is cooperative gameplay." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Jackal* the 37th best NES game on a list of 100

Insider Insight: In Fall 2003, my younger brother and I were in the midst of a run through my NES collection. It was an opportunity to revisit the gems of my childhood while also broadening Dan's gaming horizons to encompass the classics. What my collection lacked in volume, it made up for with quality. As we proceeded, the one area of deficiency that became readily apparent was in regard to two-player cooperative play. For most games we simply adapted for the absence of simultaneous co-op play by passing the controller whenever a level had been cleared or a continue was required, and that methodology suited us well. A routine visit to our local EB Games yielded an opportunity to add an old favorite to my collection and fill the co-op play void.

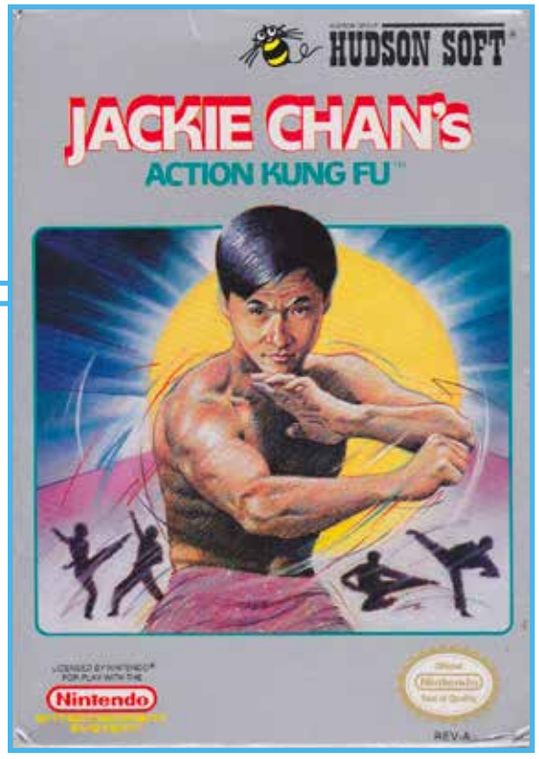
While scanning through the selection of NES carts on hand my eyes locked on a familiar title, *Jackal*. My last experience with *Jackal* had come more than a decade prior, when a childhood friend had acquired the game. He and I spent many hours playing the two-player co-op mode, and while we never successfully beat the game together, we had a ton of fun in the pursuit. Needless to say, that immediate wave of co-op nostalgia, coupled with a low asking price, made it a slam dunk purchase.

As anticipated, Dan and I had an absolute blast working together in the truest way to take this game down. We gradually devised roles and strategies to overcome problematic zones within each level and tackle each boss. Defeating the final super-tank boss and beating the game was truly a triumphant moment for us both. —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one half of Team Mayh3m, featured in the *Nintendo Quest* documentary

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Now Production
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



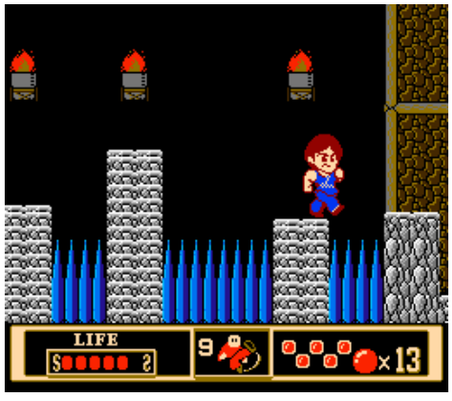
In *Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu*, the martial arts movie star must rescue his fictitious twin sister, who has disappeared into the ranks of a fiendish plot by the evil Prince Sorcerers and his ghouls. You guide a cartoonish, big-headed version of Jackie as he walks, jumps (over hazards and on platforms), punches, and kicks (including crouch kick and jump kick) his way through ninjas, swordsmen, birds, fish, tigers, and other enemies and obstacles. Pummeling frogs and certain other enemies reveals such power-ups as life points, a tornado attack, a sky attack, and a spin kick. Environments include skies, temples, fields, ice caves, and the like. Bonus rounds, where you jump across floating clouds or defend against projectiles, grant points for additional power-ups. The basic action is rather generic in nature (despite some auto-scrolling sections) and the TurboGrafx version has richer visuals, but this is nevertheless an entertaining, nice looking game. Especially cool are the bosses, such as the Combat Spider and the Shaolin Giant.

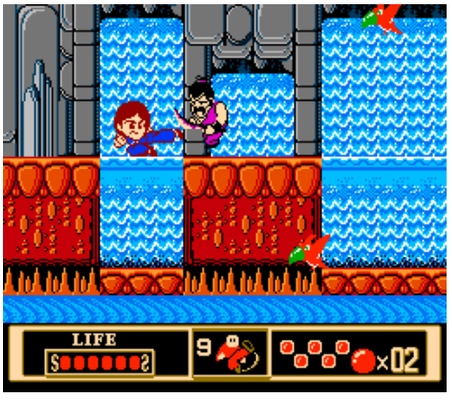
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

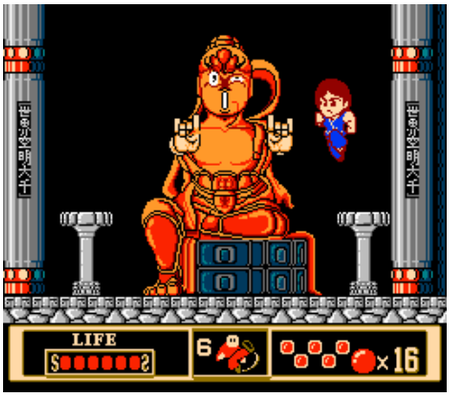
Notable Quotable:
"If you're a fan of action-packed fighting games with good graphics and characters on the humorous side, this is one that you'll enjoy." —*Nintendo Power* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"While the name may not ring a bell at first, it shouldn't shy you away from what is, in reality, a quite good game. Mixing elements from both action games and other popular games, *Jackie Chan* puts together a challenging assortment of enemy characters and bosses. Give it a try!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Graphically, this is something of a masterpiece on the NES. The cartoon sprites are surprisingly large and very funny. Sound consists of smacking noises accompanied by a fabulous jangling oriental tune. This is very similar indeed to the PC Engine version, and that is a definite compliment. *Jackie Chan* won't win any prizes for originality, but if you like bouncing around a land filled with Kung Fu critters this is the game for you. One of the best NES games for ages and essential for Jackie Chan fans." —*Computer and Video Games* (April 1992)

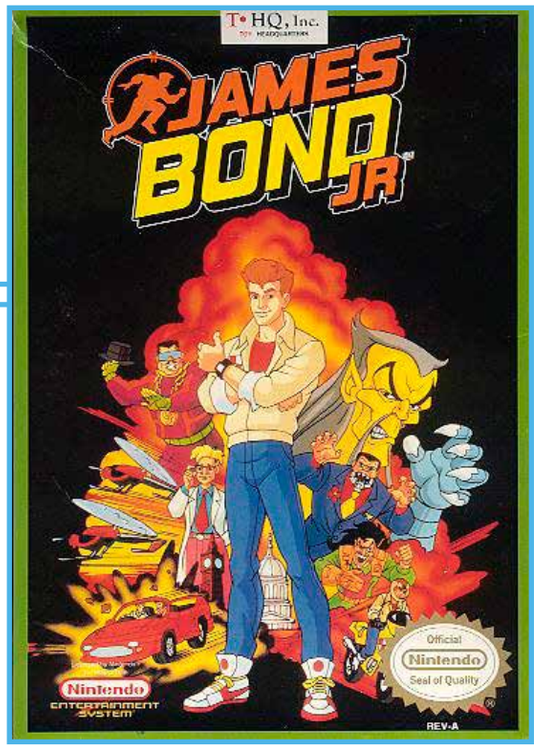






James Bond Jr.

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Eurocom Developments
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1992.



JAMES BOND JR.
PRESS START TO BEGIN MISSION
PRESS SELECT TO ENTER PASSCODE
PRESS A FOR MUSIC OPTIONS
MUSIC AND SFX
HIGHEST SCORE TODAY : 000000
COPYRIGHT (C) 1992 T-HQ,INC. (TOY HEADQUARTERS)
LICENSED BY NINTENDO

James Bond Jr. is based on the cartoon series that ran for one 65-episode season from 1991 to 1992. The game puts players in the role of James Bond's nephew, who must rescue a weapons scientist being held hostage by the evil S.C.U.M. Lord. During his mission the young super spy will jump on platforms, leap over long gaps, climb ladders, and use a gun, bombs, and flares to battle bad guys. In addition, Bond must open safes, disable missiles (similar to solving a Rubik's Cube puzzle), don scuba gear and a bubble gun, and go airborne with a jet pack. Helpful items to grab include extra ammo, shields, clocks (extra time), hamburgers (health), and a werewolf potion that lets him jump higher and unleash ferocious attacks as a wolfman (plus guard dogs won't bother him). The characters and levels are very nicely drawn and detailed, making the game more sophisticated in appearance than most 8-bit titles.

Notable Quotable:

"Unless you're a big Bond fan, stay well away from this below average and instantly forgettable game." —*N-Force* (March 1993)

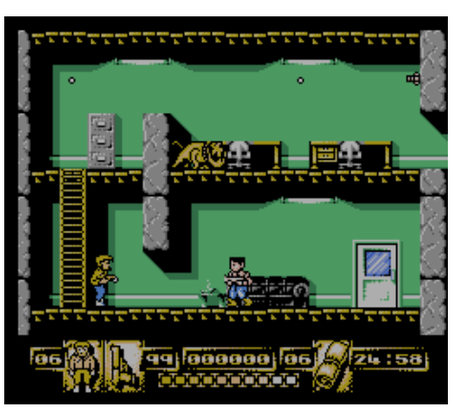
Notable Quotable:

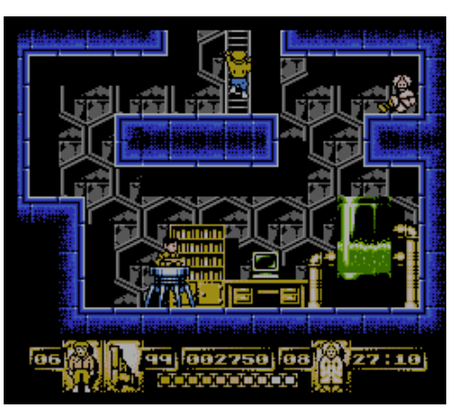
"The polished visuals have a refined look, with detailed backgrounds and well-animated characters. Unfortunately, the game relies heavily on making long series of jumps and has a tendency to trap you between an enemy and an obstacle, causing James to bounce repeatedly until his death. However, a large supply of lives and continues goes a long way toward counteracting these flaws." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*James Bond Jr.*'s gameplay style does successfully evoke the same feeling of exploration as some of the more successful non-linear games that appeared earlier in the NES' life, though it does take a fair number of liberties with the style. Unlike most games of its ilk James rarely requires an item to gain access to an area, meaning that most of each level is wide open from the very beginning. This is, however, counterbalanced by the imposition of an extremely strict time limit: each of the levels has numerous branching paths and no map is provided, in-game or otherwise. Unless the area layout has been memorized and the player systematically approaches it based on the placement of objectives James will inevitably run out of time. This questionable design choice sits at odds with the non-linear nature of the level structure, as it effectively serves to punish those wishing to fully explore the areas . . .control is responsive . . .an excellent-looking game . . .a unique and worthwhile experience . . .too many rough edges to be considered a true classic." —NintendoComplete.com

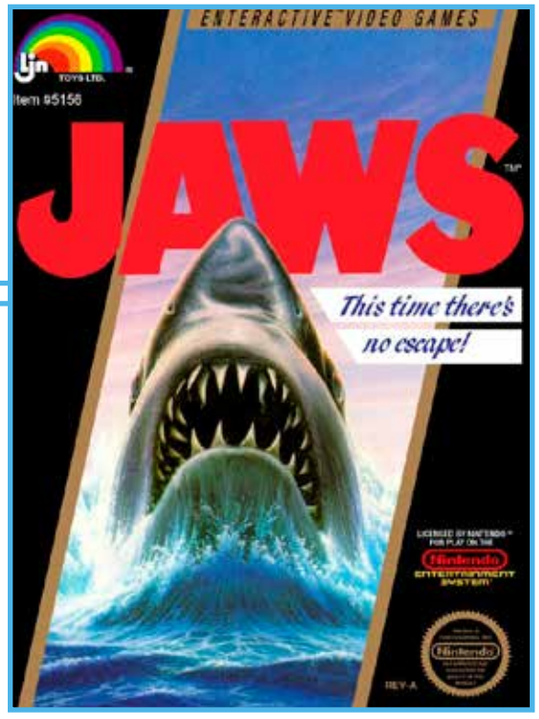
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Jaws

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Westone Bit Entertainment
GAME TYPE: Adventure/ Non-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



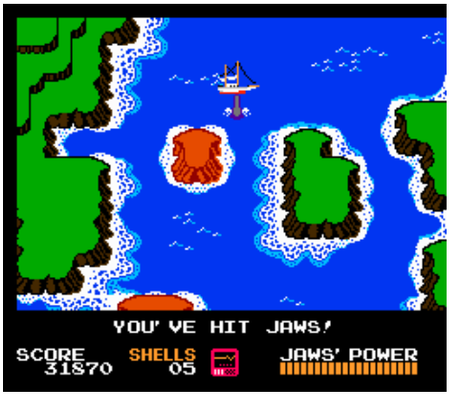
In 1975, Steven Spielberg terrified filmgoers with *Jaws*, a scary movie about a killer shark. In 1987, LGN and Westone Bit Entertainment bored gamers with *Jaws*, a non-[illegible] video game about a killer shark. Actually, the game is loosely based on *Jaws: The Revenge* (1987), which was the fourth and final film in the famous franchise. The action is divided into four types of gameplay: a pointless overhead map sequence where you pilot a sailboat until it inadvertently hits the titular shark; a dull underwater side view scenario where you use a boat, a diver, or a mini-sub to shoot sea creatures and gather conch shells, which increase your spear gun power; a fairly decent bonus scene involving the bombing of jellyfish with an airplane that flies by overhead; and an anticlimactic first-person finale where you try and ram the famous fish with the bow of your ship.

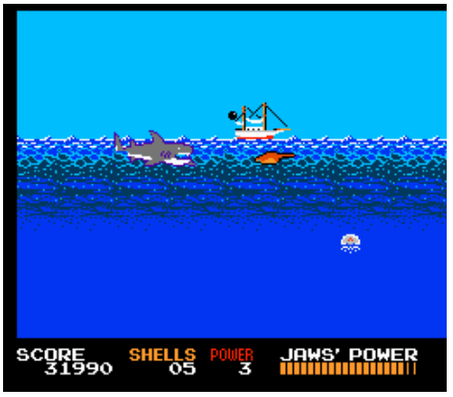
Memories: Like most everyone with any taste, I love Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*—the film holds up remarkably well. Unlike many people, I can tolerate (and even enjoy on some level) the sequels; however, I can't stand this game. It certainly has its fans (the late, great video game journalist Bill Kunkel called it one of his favorites), but I'm not one of them.

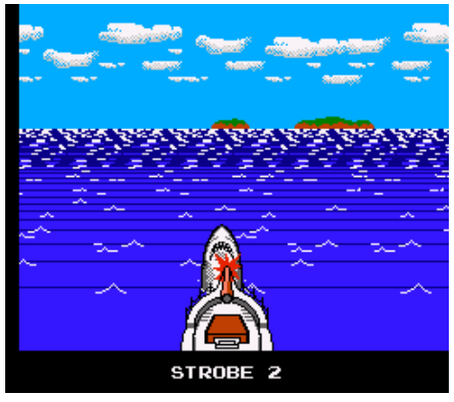
Notable Quotable:
"The graphics, animations, and gameplay in *Jaws* are all first rate. If this is any indication of what LJN can produce in the video game theater, they should forget about the wrestling dolls and buckle down to full-time game design immediately!" – *Computer Gaming World* (August 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Compared to other games of its time *Jaws* still packs some graphic power. They're terrific—everything looks like what it's supposed to and there's lots of color and just enough animation . . . The controls are tight . . .it's just plain dull. It takes way too long to build up enough power to take on Jaws, and by that time you won't be interested anymore. Every time your diver is killed by a lucky jellyfish your power level goes back to the bottom, which is like starting over. During this long quest you are forced to listen to a terrible droning tune. No option to turn it off. Come to think of it, there are no options for anything at all. I wouldn't rate *Jaws* lower than the ocean's floor, but it's definitely sleeping with the fishes in my collection." —Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING







Insider Insight: When I was a kid I was absolutely obsessed with the movie *Jaws*. The characters, the deaths, the music, and the dialogue are just about perfect. Nine-year-old me couldn't get enough. I was so obsessed, in fact, that I frequently thought about what most *Jaws* fans refuse to even acknowledge: the sequels. Now, I would certainly argue that *Jaws 2* holds up pretty well and *Jaws 3-D* is a good time at the theater (thanks, Alamo Drafthouse!), but even I, the ultimate *Jaws* fanboy, is sensible enough to recognize how terrible *Jaws: The Revenge* is. The characters, the deaths, the music, and the dialogue are absolutely awful. Granted, I still watch it on occasion and can appreciate it to some extent, but I do recognize that, well, it sucks.

Fast forward to the day I discovered *Jaws* for the NES. My mind raced. Would I get to play as Chief Brody? Would I battle the shark as the *Orca* starts to sink? What about Quint and Hooper? Would there be any levels on a beach? I couldn't wait to see what it was all about. Once I started playing, however, I started to realize that this game wasn't based on the 1975 classic, but in fact the horrendous horror mentioned above: *Jaws: The Revenge*. In addition, the game mostly consists of levels with measly stingrays and jellyfish. All of these elements would make for a bad game in hindsight, and many people certainly seem to argue that. Despite all of this I absolutely love it. Its simplicity is nice after a long day at work, and the fact that I can beat it in about 30 minutes makes for a good break. (I once beat the game at a Game Over Videogames in Austin when my dad was signing his books.) I can also appreciate and laugh at the random references it has to a movie that seems to be universally hated. While I've never had quite the obsession with the game as I have had with *Jaws* itself, I still look back on it in a positive light. —Ryan Weiss, editor of the *Tales from a Retro Gamer* YouTube show

Insider Insight: I really loved *Jaws* the book and *Jaws* the movie. When *Jaws* was released on the NES in the late '80s, I bought the game having no idea what to expect.

Turns out, I enjoyed it! *Jaws* had a different flow to it than other games; you'd have a top-down map view of your boat on the ocean and you'd move around from one port to another. While traveling to these ports you'd randomly encounter something and then be transported to a fun, horizontally designed portion of the game where you'd move up and down and left and right. Shooting stuff to the left or right of you could lead to prizes that you'd want to collect. I really got into the game, especially this shooting part, but it is tough to finish.

As I always do with every video game I get, I asked my wife Susan if she'd like to give *Jaws* a try and she said, "Sure!" I was a bit shocked; I just figured she wouldn't be interested in this sort of game, but I was totally wrong! She absolutely loved the gameplay, the music, and just about everything *Jaws* had to offer.

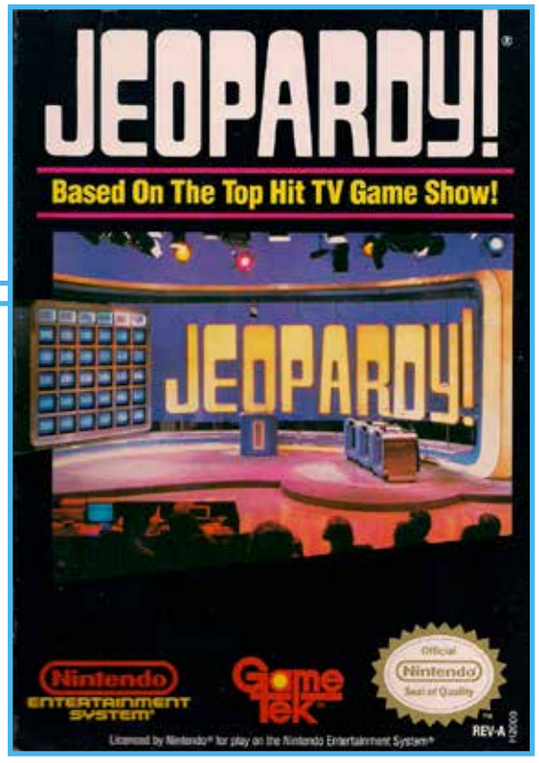
I recently fired up the game for the first time in years and really got back into it, and Susan couldn't wait to try it again. It's funny watching her play this game—she's always so focused. I was trying to film her without her knowing as she was playing. While I was filming she just happened to be going up against Jaws, who makes limited appearances in the game and is very tough.

While she's frantically hitting the fire button as fast as possible trying to defeat the giant shark she quickly turned her head while still hitting the fire button and noticed I was right there and turned her head back to the screen, only to discover that Jaws got her and it was game over. I said, "I'm so sorry!" I felt so bad! She said, "No problem!" Then she picked up the controller and played again! —Steve Woita, video game programmer and designer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Jeopardy!

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Gameshow, 1–3 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



Jeopardy! for the NES is missing host Alex Trebek, but it's a solid translation of the popular game show. The theme song is recognizable, and there are almost 3,000 trivia answers/questions in more than 400 categories, meaning repeats are relatively few and far between. As play begins, three contestants are shown standing behind podiums (the computer fills in if only one or two humans are playing), then the view switches to a board showing six different categories. Each category is at the top of a column, with each column containing a series of progressively higher dollar amounts.

After a category and dollar amount has been selected a trivia question is posed, and within a set time limit players must answer the question by guiding a cursor along an alphabet to spell out the word or words. The controller functions may seem tedious to casual gamers but they get the job done, and the contestants react animatedly to various situations. Includes Daily Double, Double Jeopardy!, and Final Jeopardy!

Memories: I remember my mom watching *Jeopardy!* on TV when it was hosted by Art Fleming. I also remember her playing the board game with my Aunt Norma. The trivia seemed so arcane and boring since I was just a dumb little kid, but I grew to appreciate the show over time. As I write this, current longtime host Alex Trebek, a smooth professional if there ever was one, is battling pancreatic cancer, and I wish him the very best.

Notable Quotable:
"Feels nothing like the fast paced, quick-on-your feet show that it's based on." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The lack of tolerance for misspellings can at times prove infuriating . . .one can never be sure if 'Washington' is an acceptable alternative to 'George Washington,' nor if 'Old McDonald' is going to be accepted in lieu of 'Old MacDonald.' This unfortunate quirk in the scoring system tends to produce a fair amount of flux in game scores . . . The stilted animations that reflect the badly disfigured participants' excitement and shame are unabashedly poor and contribute considerably to the humor and personality of the game. The board is just as mundane and unexciting as it ever was on *Jeopardy*, and when compounded by the inexplicable lack of Alex Trebek (or any host figure for that matter), the visuals can leave the player feeling underwhelmed. The title screen enthusiastically blares its 8-bit interpretation of the theme song." —NintendoComplete.com

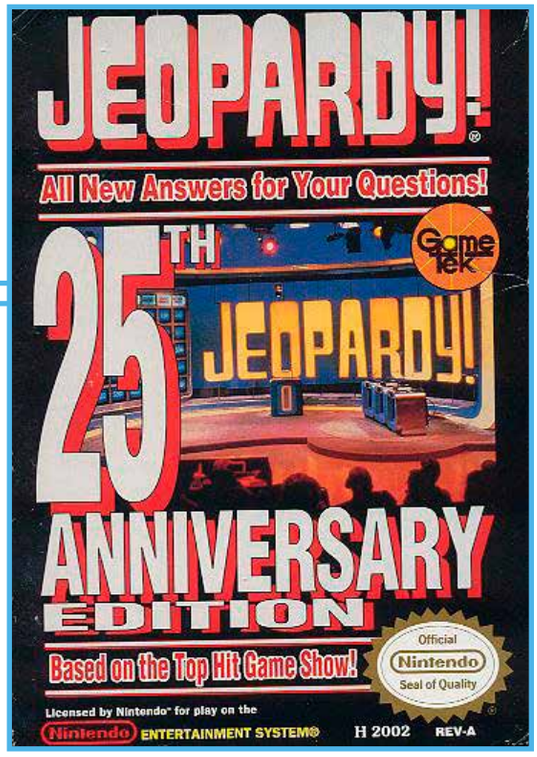
Notable Quotable:
"Cheating can be pulled off by simply ringing in as soon as the question appears. There is no 'lock-out' time for everyone to read the question, so frequently my father would just ring in instantly and THEN read the question—taking a (usually correct) gamble that he would know the answer." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

MY FAVORITE MONSTER
$100
IT WAS A GRAVEYARD SMASH
WHAT IS THE
MONSTER MASH
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z &
← END
19

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Game show, 1–3 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



Released to coincide with the long-running TV game show's silver anniversary, *Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition* plays like the first *Jeopardy!* game for the NES. It offers almost 2,000 new trivia questions. Categories include Historical Events, Sports Facts, Animals, The Bible, Human Body, Birds, Aussie English, and many more. As in previous editions of the game, certain misspellings are accepted while others are considered to be the wrong answer. The game consists of three rounds—Jeopardy!, Double Jeopardy!, and Final Jeopardy!—the last of which is a single question where you can wager up to your total earnings, ideally basing said wager on your knowledge of the category presented. Unfortunately, despite the celebratory nature of the game, host Alex Trebek, who wouldn't show up in a console video game until the Genesis and SNES versions of *Jeopardy!*, remains missing in action.

Notable Quotable:

"If you weren't born in the '70s or early '80s and have an extensive pop culture knowledge, I'd wager that the questions will frustrate your supple, youthful brain. That being said, if you have a multi-tap and two extra controllers get some three-player action going. Silly game show games like this are always great with lots of people mocking your abilities to answer properly. If you're a loner, though, there's still plenty to mock, like the downright gruesome-looking contestants." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"A nice complement to the original *Jeopardy!* . . . Questions must be typed into the NES using a cursor and an on-screen keyboard. This has the effect of irritating some folks, but only a little patience is provided to address this hurdle. *Jeopardy!* isn't supposed to be a fast-paced, exciting game. Therefore, those too impatient to type in their questions with a cursor shouldn't be playing trivia games in the first place. One serious problem with typing in the correct question for the answer provided is that spelling counts . . .sometimes. The game will accept some misspellings and not others . . .a great trivia game. The graphics are adequate and many of the sounds will be familiar to fans of television's *Jeopardy!*" —Jeff Irwin (formerly at allgame.com)

POTENT POTABLES
$100
THE SWEETER THESE ARE
ORIGINALLY, THE HIGHER
THE ALCOHOLIC CONTENT
OF THE WINE WILL BE
WHAT ARE
GRAPES
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z & ← END
38

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Jeopardy! Junior Edition

PUBLISHER: GameTek
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Game show, 1–3 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989

Based on *Jeopardy!*, one of the highest rated and longest running game shows in the history of television, *Jeopardy! Junior* is a trivia game for the younger set (though some of the questions are tough). Up to three players can compete for cash by answering questions (actually, as *Jeopardy!* fans know, the questions are posed as answers and the answers take the form of questions) from a board of six different categories. In all, there are almost 2,000 questions in more than 400 categories. Categories include things like Fiction Baddies, Color Words, Inventors, Plant Zoo, Weather, Paul Bunyon, Birds, Holidays, and Muppet Movies. To get the opportunity to answer a question you must be the first to buzz in. To give your answer you must spell it out with your controller, pointing and clicking on letters of the alphabet. If a player gives the wrong answer another contestant can buzz in. The player with the most cash at the end of Jeopardy!, Double Jeopardy!, and Final Jeopardy! wins the game.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"I was given time to read the questions and buzz in most of the time . . . This is basically a reskinned version of the other *Jeopardy!* game on the Nintendo. It would have been cool if I at least got to see Alex Trebek . . . The contestants were happy whenever I got a question correct . . . I had a very fun time playing this." —ClassicGamerReviews (YouTube)

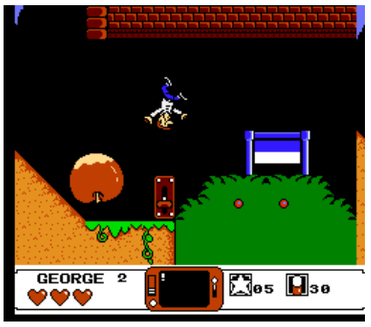
Notable Quotable:

"I'm not sure the character designer has ever actually seen a child before. These characters are demonic, with soulless, empty eyes. Whenever they get an answer right it looks like the hysterical laughter of a psychopath right after a kill . . . Even though this is the *Junior Edition*, some of the questions are actually pretty hard . . . The controls are quick and responsive, making it easy to type in your answer within the time limit . . . *Jeopardy!* is known for a small handful of audio clips, and yet they weren't used in the game . . .a solid adaptation of the show, and one I will probably regularly come back to for a quick 30 minutes of fun." —Deadpark (www.deadpark.com)

DAILY DOUBLE
CONGRATULATIONS ALAKA , YOU HAVE FOUND A DAILY DOUBLE.
NOW YOU CAN WAGER ANY AMOUNT BETWEEN $5 & $03700
ONLY YOU MAY ATTEMPT THIS.
AMOUNT $3700
ALAKA ENTER HOW MUCH OF YOUR $03700 YOU WISH TO WAGER.
12

The Jetsons: Cogswell's Caper

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Natsume
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Cogswell Cogs is destroying Planet M38 by mining ore to create their cogs, prompting Mr. Spacely of rival Spacely Sprockets into action. He recruits his employee George Jetson to stop the destruction. Based on the classic sci-fi cartoon, *The Jetsons: Cogswell's Caper* puts players in the role of George (the affable but lazy family patriarch), who must run, jump, fly, ride elevators, and hop on trampolines and moving platforms through 12 levels of play: Cogswell's Office, Rock Concert Hall, Cosmo World, Gear Factory, Sports Gym, Mining Factory, Home, Space Ball Stadium, Blast Furnace, Dream Land, Packing Factory, and Botanical Garden. To thwart the robots, archers, UFOs, and other enemies he'll encounter, George can pick up and throw blocks. George will also pull switches to alter levels, turn on lights, activate teleporters, walk on the ceiling, run from giant cogs, and more. Fellow cast mates Rosie, Astro, Elroy, Jane, and Judy are on hand to dish out advice, magnetic boots, power packs, a jet board, and a remote control. Certain areas are auto-scrolling. A hard game to find, *Cogswell's Caper* appears to run on the same game engine as *The Flintstones: Surprise at Dinosaur Peak* (which, of course, is far less common than even *Cogswell's Caper*).

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Memories: I grew up a huge fan of *The Jetsons* cartoon and was happy to discover Natsume treated the IP well. I preferred the sci-fi setting of the series to the prehistoric era of *The Flintstones*, but I liked both shows.

Notable Quotable:

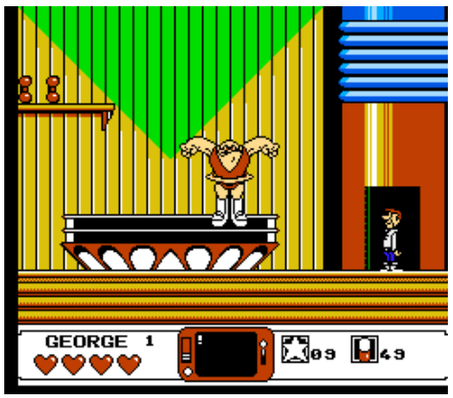
"The action is strictly of the standard run-and-jump variety, but the visuals and music are appropriately cartoonish. Infinite continues help balance out a challenge that's a bit on the difficult side." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

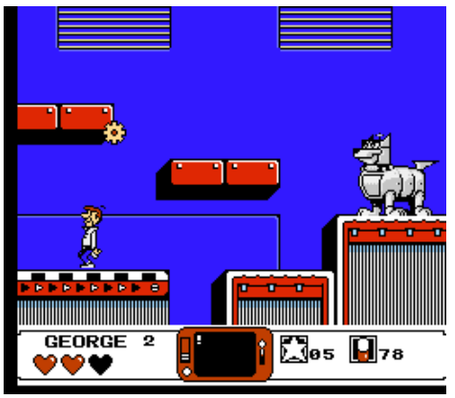
Notable Quotable:

"I love *The Jetsons*, but *The Jetsons: Cogswell's Caper* is a fairly dreadful game . . .our hero George looks and moves in an odd manner . . . Jumps don't always occur when you want them to . . .imagery may be enough to bring back awesome memories of *The Jetsons* and how delightfully cute Judy was, but as a game—it's not good." —8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

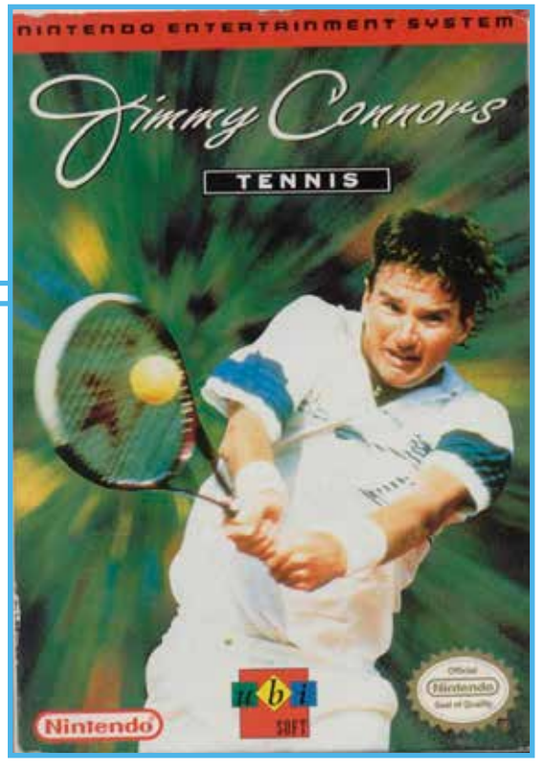
"Combines some nice cartoon-style graphics with an interesting play technique to serve up a very addictive NES cart! Uncovering the various power-ups hidden under the piles of cubed crates, piloting George through each stage delivers cool visuals, nice sounds and, above all, strong gameplay . . .the cinema displays are straight out of the cartoon . . .a challenge when you get to later levels." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)





Jimmy Connors Tennis

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: NMS Software
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1993

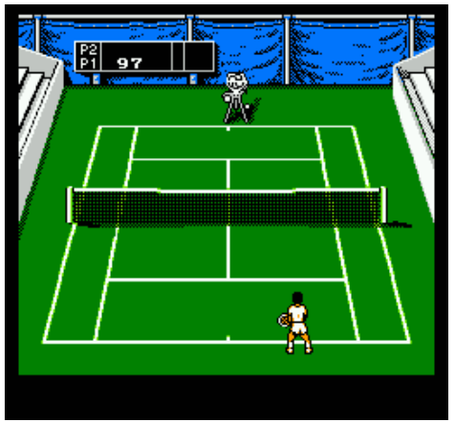


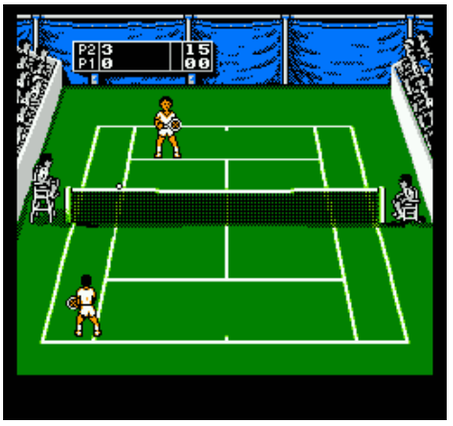
Jimmy Connors Tennis is a typical video game version of the popular sport. Although it is endorsed by one of the great tennis players of all time. Viewing the action from behind the court and slightly above the player, gamers can execute the shots you'd expect, including lob, drop, normal, strong, forehand, and backhand, and the d-pad is used to influence the direction and depth of hits. Modes of play include Practice (beginner, intermediate, advance, or smash play) and Tournament (beginner, intermediate, or advanced), the latter of which features 16 different countries and three types of courts: grass, hard, and clay. The tennis players are nicely animated (if similar in design) and the computer poses a substantial challenge, even in the easier modes of play. Followed by *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour*, which you can read about in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*.

Memories: Tennis was huge during the '70s and '80s, with lots of marquee players. I had a great deal of respect for Jimmy Connors and thought he seemed cool, but I was more into Bjorn Borg and Chris Evert. In addition to watching the sport on television and playing tennis video games I played a lot of real tennis. It's probably my second favorite sport to play next to basketball. During the 1980 heat wave my friend Troy and I played a few matches on a blacktop court in 113-degree weather. Now that's dedication.

Notable Quotable:
"*Jimmy Connors Tennis* has a control scheme that is surprisingly deep for an 8-bit game, and overall it's an excellent simulation of the sport. It does have some glaring omissions (especially the doubles mode), but the singles mode is solid and plays well in both the long and short game." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"A well-rounded NES tennis game. The sharp graphics are above average by 8-bit standards, and the animation is smooth and responsive. Die-hard tennis fans will want to turn off the repetitive soundtrack, though. The computer opponent poses a formidable challenge, even on beginner and intermediate settings. Plus the variety of courts and the globe-hopping tournament add to the enjoyment. Just like one of Jimmy's shots, this game's a winner!" —*GamePro* (July 1993)





OSCHIFTER PUBLISHING

Joe & Mac

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Elite Systems
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1992

One day, while Mac was out hunting dinosaurs, Neanderthal nerds stormed the village, eating and drinking all the brontoburgers and berry juice and stealing all the cave women. Mac's friend Joe springs into action, vowing to make things right. Based on the 1991 Data East arcade game, which is known as *Caveman Ninja: Joe & Mac*, and *Caveman Ninja: Joe & Mac*, this port is missing the two-player simultaneous mode. And despite the name "Mac" in the title, he is not a playable character. The prehistoric action finds Joe running, jumping on platforms, and throwing stone axes, flints, boomerangs, fireballs, and stone wheels at baby pteranodons, archaeopteryx, zephyrosaurus, electric flying fish, tyrant triffids, and helirock bombs, which are dropped by Caveman Crowswing from his "helirockter." Jumping and throwing a weapon at the same time is a common tactic, and Joe can eat food to restore his energy and score points. The game takes place in 10 stone age areas spread across five levels: Volcanic Valley of Valor, Ocean of Silurian, Rapids of Ramapithecus, Bonseville Basin, and Petrified Forest of Fossileons.

Memories: If you had a sexy new Super Nintendo in 1992, the year after the console came out, there was no need to purchase *Joe & Mac* on the aging NES. The SNES version had better graphics and retained the two-player co-op mode, just for starters.

Notable Quotable:
"Sampled speech, multi-layer parallax scrolling, and a multitude of color-drenched backdrops make this primordial pastime a real hit." —*N-Force* (June 1992)

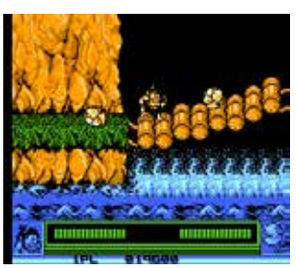
Notable Quotable:
"This game tests your patience more than your ability. The levels take no time to run through. Your opponents are like the terrain—sparse . . . Although colorful, *J&M*'s graphics are prehistoric . . .flat backgrounds and sprites . . . As for the music, it's not rock 'n' roll. Instead you get rock-splitting clinks and clanks." —*GamePro* – (May 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Data East must be given credit for continuing to support the rapidly dying NES. *Joe & Mac* is a very good game considering the limitations of the system. Although the game is short and a bit on the easy side, the younger audience will thoroughly enjoy this version . . .parallax scrolling backgrounds and large bosses . . .a really cute game . . . I cannot see a serious gamer getting a real charge out of this version." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1992)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

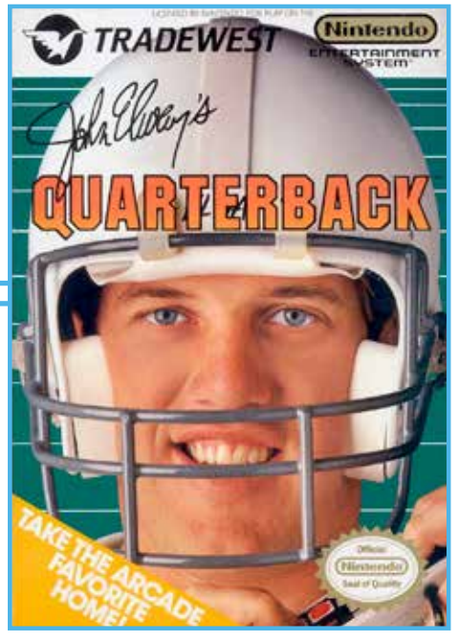
Insider Insight: Of all the great arcade companies, I have always considered Data East one of the most underrated. They weren't the most prolific coin-op company out there, they rarely (if ever) produced the games that made the most money, and weren't a company you'd hear people talk about very much. But when you look at their back catalog of quirky games that re-imagined already popular concepts, you start to see just how many great titles they made. *Joe & Mac* is one you can add to a long list containing the likes of *Robocop*, *BurgerTime*, *Sly Spy*, and *Midnight Resistance*. Taking the caveman theme popularized by games like *Bonk's Adventure* and *B.C.'s Quest for Tires*, this title takes elements from platform games, run-and-guns, and scrolling beat-'em-ups to create a fun and frantic title full of comedic moments.

Although the game originated in the arcades, my first memory of playing *Joe & Mac* actually comes from the NES. Until I saw it in *Game Zone* I wasn't even aware of the game's existence, and my brother's friend John quickly added it to his collection, having already been a huge fan of anything related to dinosaurs. Living next door, I'd often be there playing games with his older brother Martin (who by this time had moved on to an Atari ST and a Lynx), but we'd always stick our heads into John's room to see what they were up to, and to annoy them more than anything else! We both liked the look of *Joe & Mac*, and it was one of the few 8-bit games that could divert us from our own 16-bit platforms at the time. The only downside was that it lacked a simultaneous two-player mode, which frankly made a mockery of the game's title, but that was later corrected by the 16-bit ports thankfully.—Kieren Hawken is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years.



John Elway's Quarterback

PUBLISHER: Tradewest
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



Endorsed by the Denver Broncos player who twice won the AFC Player of the Year Award, *John Elway's Quarterback* is based on Leland's 1988 coin-op game, *John Elway's Team Quarterback*. You can call nine offensive and six defensive plays. To aim a pass or kick, you must guide a cursor in the desired direction. Once you have called a play you don't necessarily have to stick with it. For example, if you have called a Bomb and the defense is in Prevent you can abandon the play and run a quarterback draw, which should take the defense off guard and net you a few yards. On defense you control the middle linebacker, but you can switch control to the player closest to the ball with a simple press of the B button. You can also jump to intercept passes and make diving tackles. Diving can be useful on offense when you are running the ball. Although teams are always red or blue and the game lacks an NFL license for official team names and logos, there are 14 different teams from which to choose. Each team fields the requisite 11-man squad. The action takes place from an overhead perspective, with the screen scrolling vertically to follow the ball.

Notable Quotable:

"The best thing about this game is that you can lend it to a friend and not get too upset if it doesn't come back . . .the limited pass control and meager number of plays make the game predictable . . .the figures look a little Play-Doughy, but the animation is good . . . There are inferior football games on the market such as *10 Yard Fight* and *Play Action Football*, but there are also better games, most notably *Tecmo Bowl* and *NFL Football*." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

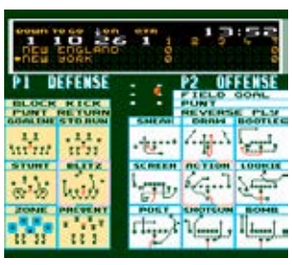
"The most obvious difference between *John Elway's Quarterback* and its coin-op cousin is the loss of the spring-loaded joystick. Rare managed to compensate for this loss through a combination of holding the pass button down and using the d-pad to target where the pass is thrown. This alternative method of play control works, but it's slower than it should be. This can contribute to quarterbacks getting sacked because it takes too long to set the desired target. Another occasional problem with the design is being forced to let the ball go before the target is set as desired, which can lead to costly interceptions . . . If you like to run the football with your offense this is not the game for you . . .plays just fine . . .limited replay value . . .the CPU is just too easy, and there aren't any difficulty settings to even things out . . .there isn't any kind of season play or a lasting gameplay mode to keep players coming back." —Peter Skerritt (retrorefereedotcom.wordpress.com)

Insider Insight: *John Elway's Quarterback* was not the inaugural football game on the NES (*10-Yard Fight* arrived first), nor was it the greatest football game on the NES (*Tecmo Bowl* surely takes that cake). But it is definitely the football game on the NES that I played the most. Why? The easy answer is that I owned it and not the other two. But I wouldn't have repeatedly played games that weren't fun, and in my view, *John Elway's Quarterback* was the most enjoyable football game on the NES.

Yes, the graphics are primitive, the play calling limited, the action unrealistic, and Elway isn't even in the game as a player. But the on-field limitations also allow the game to be very easily learned, and when everyone competing has about the same skill level, any two-player match can turn into a hilariously hard-fought, high-scoring slugfest. And indeed, my friends and I would regularly duke it out on *JEQ*, and in those pre-*Madden*, and even pre-*Tecmo Bowl* days, it became a major staple of our elementary school-era video game lives.

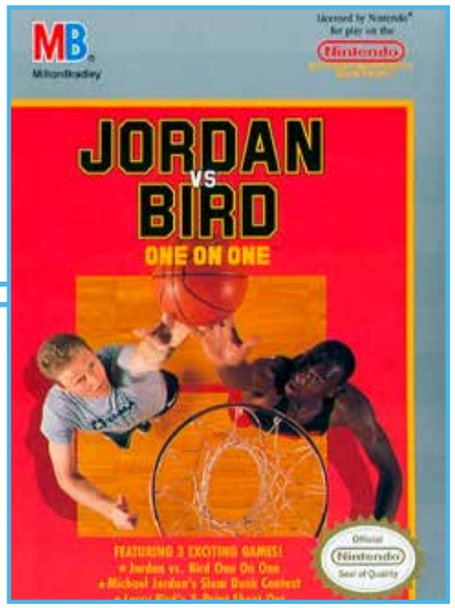
Of course my favorite play was the trick where your wide receiver would run ridiculously fast—just switch from normal to reverse on the play calling sub-screen, wait until the sub-screen timer runs down, and once back on the field simply toss the ball to the nearest wide receiver (or even do a quarterback sneak—it works that way too). Touchdown effectively guaranteed. Today the game has little replay value unless you want a chuckle from re-experiencing this glitch. But we can nevertheless recall its moment of popularity, and while perhaps this is wishful thinking, maybe even John Elway still remembers it fondly from time to time. I certainly still do. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Jordan vs Bird: One on One

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley
DEVELOPER: Rare
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous)
YEAR: 1989



Adapted from the 1988 computer game, *Jordan vs Bird: One on One* lets players control NBA greats Michael Jordan and Larry Bird as they face off against one another. Approximating reality to some degree, Jordan's specialty is dunking while Bird's expertise is knocking down three pointers. (Jordan and especially Bird are also great shooters, but that obviously doesn't matter in a one-on-one contest.) Players are penalized for traveling, shot clock violations, charging, blocking, and failing to clear the ball, and there are four selectable difficulty levels and period lengths. Gameplay is slow but fairly entertaining, and the graphics are clear and nicely animated and detailed. The cartridge includes a 3-Point Contest and a Slam Dunk Contest, the latter of which employs a hard-to-perfect maneuver where Jordan must take off from a specific location on the court for each particular dunk.

Notable Quotable:

"This cartridge is great at parties . . .a lot of fun . . .even after you master the skills, the cartridge offers enough variety to keep things interesting . . .the animation of the players is

fine, but a change of scenery—say, an overhead view for the Slam Dunk or 3-Point competition—would have been nice . . .you may not have the fingertip control of the ball as you would in real life, but the feel of the jump shots and the need for precise trajectories are very realistic." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"By the time this 1988 Nintendo game hit stores, Bird had gotten the best of Air Jordan, with Larry Legend's Boston Celtics eliminating MJ's Chicago Bulls in back-to-back three-game sweeps in the first round of the NBA playoffs in 1986 and 1987. That being said, a young Michael Jordan would certainly make an impression on the older Bird in each series, including an unbelievable 63-point display in Game 2 of the 1986 first round series. So when the video game *Jordan vs. Bird: One on One*, came out, it was supposed to be as good as the actual rivalry itself, right? Wrong." —Mark Lelinwalla (www.techtimes.com)

Notable Quotable:

"As the NES/*Super Mario Bros.* combination was the first thing my parents ever got me, I think they assumed it'd be a cute little diversion from which I could eventually springboard into real hobbies, like sports. My dad's purchase of *Jordan vs Bird: One on One* was probably meant to facilitate this end by bridging the world of the virtual and the real . . .my parents' plan backfired; rather than wanting to drop the NES controller and experience 'real' basketball, I remained perfectly content with the virtual version of the sport. I no longer needed real physical activity because the video games were so much more fun." —Anthony Burch (www.destructoid.com)

Insider Insight: Hardly anything summarizes late-1980s basketball more than hearing the names Michael Jordan and Larry Bird. Sure, Magic and Kareem could have also made the cut, and to be really nitpicky Jordan won his NBA titles in the '90s. But if you have to choose two superstars for a head-on, 8-bit-era b-ball game, it doesn't get much better than Air Jordan and Larry Legend. Indeed, Bird had already co-starred in a computer game predecessor, 1983's *Julius Erving and Larry Bird Go One-on-One*. But Dr. J retired several seasons later and Jordan rightfully ascended the ladder to join Bird for the 1988 NES sequel.

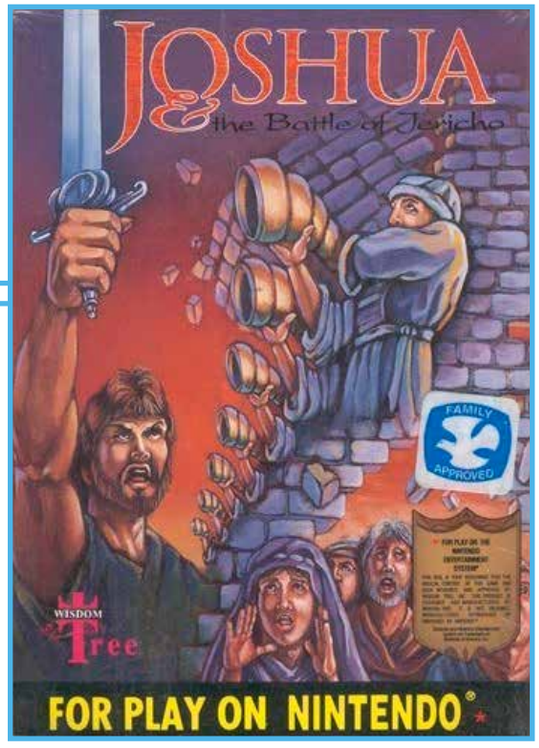
Jordan vs. Bird is not traditional team-style basketball à la *Double Dribble*; the title is literal, with gameplay choices of a Jordan slam dunk contest, a Bird three-point competition, and a one-on-one battle between Michael and Larry. The real question, of course, is whom to choose: His Airness or The Hick from French Lick. The Incredi-Bulls or Celtic Pride. Silky long range jumpers or high-flying jams. Either way you really can't go wrong—both players are amazing, and the game is tons of fun. (And for those too young to remember, yes, The Hick from French Lick was actually one of Bird's nicknames!)

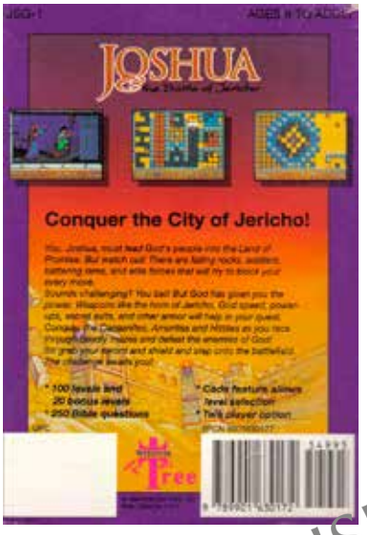
I loved playing as both, and while I didn't own the game growing up, I played it often at my friend Ryan's house, where we regularly competed against each other in all three of the game's modes. The best part? It typically would then inspire us to head outside and play an actual game of one-on-one in his driveway. Of course, at age 10 we couldn't remotely come close to dunking or hitting true 3-point shots. But Larry and MJ sure made us dream of it! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Joshua and the Battle of Jericho

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree
DEVELOPER: Wisdom Tree
GAME TYPE: Maze/Maze Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1992



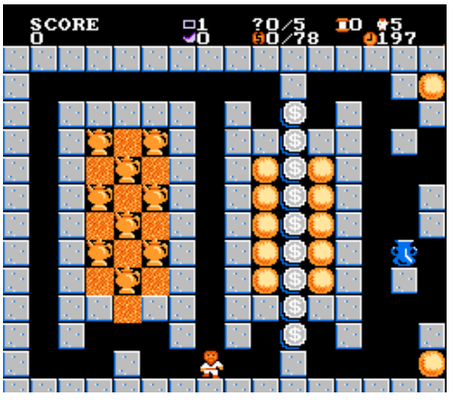


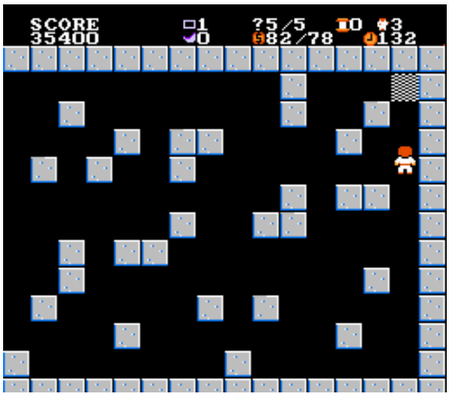
The sequel to *Exodos: Journey to the Promised Land*, *Joshua and the Battle of Jericho* uses the same game engine as *Crysta[illegible]* but is retrofitted with a biblical theme. Players guide Joshua through a series of 100 timed levels, tooting his trumpet (i.e., shooting his weapon) to clear away enemies and obstacles, including Hittite citizens, Israelite discontent (textured squares), pieces of the Jericho wall (circles), and temporary boundaries (gray squares). Joshua can also drop items on enemies and grab numerous prizes, including the Lord's direction (for extended trumpet gunfire), ram's horns (for eliminating stubborn enemies), shovels (for shoveling through virtually all objects), and the Lord's favor (temporary invincibility). The objective in each level is to collect five questions (the game includes 250 trivia questions based on the book of Joshua), gather all the iron, brass, silver, and gold, and find the exit. Includes digitized speech, such as "Good job, Joshua" and "Be courageous, Joshua." Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:
"This game is largely the same type of experience as its predecessor with some improvements, such as new power-ups, and some omissions, such as music during levels. It's worth playing if you enjoyed *Exodus*, or simply if you enjoy puzzles." —Asheton Phinney (*Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985-1995)*)

Notable Quotable:
"Given Wisdom Tree's notoriety in retro circles, their take on the mediocre puzzler *Crystal Mines* should not have been any good. Yet while most of Wisdom Tree's games copied from other genres and forced Biblical stuff in, most of *Joshua*'s hundred levels create small stories so it doesn't feel like just an action puzzler. Though the puzzles are quite good . . . The first fifty levels are pretty forgiving. Each has a mirror image in the next fifty, where power-ups and time to complete the level are scarcer. The treasure count needed to advance is greater and Joshua starts somewhere awkward, where he could get trapped . . . Joshua is so solid technically that the quizzes every five levels—with accompanying pictures—are just an afterthought . . .while *Joshua* doesn't have the drama of David defeating Goliath or Noah piling animals like a triple-decker sandwich, its beautiful and practical schemes make it easy enough to learn, and the hidden parts of each level leave it playable once you've forgotten them." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

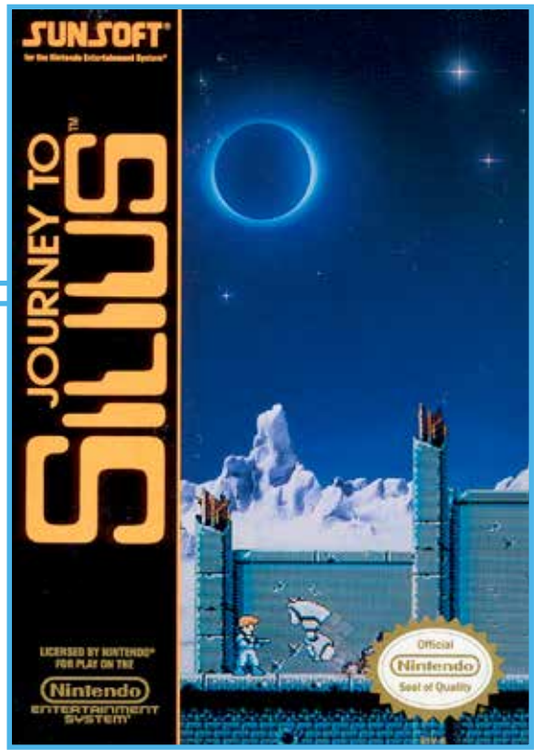
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Journey to Silius

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Tokai Engineering
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Produced under the working title of "The Terminator," but changed when Sunsoft lost the *Terminator* movie licens[illegible]*rney to Silius* has gamers guiding Jay [illegible]y as he battles his way through five long, futuristic, nicely rendered levels, each of which ends with a huge boss. Levels include A Deserted Space Colony in Space Age 0373 (helicopter boss), Underground Concourse (war vehicle robot), Terrorist Headquarters (troop of cannons), Inside the Terrorist's Spaceship (mammoth cannon), and Inside the Terrorist's Spaceship Factory (giant exodus spaceship). McCray, who must face a giant android at the very end of the game, is armed with a handgun that has unlimited firepower. He can pick up a shotgun, a machine gun, homing missiles, a laser rifle, and a grenade launcher, and each of which can be reloaded by grabbing energy capsules. These are used to take on the various robotic ground and air units, gun/missile emplacements, etc. The running, gunning, platforming action is a blast (literally and figuratively). The controls are tight and the gameplay is challenging thanks to moving platforms, scarce health pickups, and lots of enemies and obstacles, including lasers firing from gun emplacements and spiders that crawl on space station walls. The grade-A action is complemented nicely by a rousing musical score.

Notable Quotable:

"This game is not going to win any awards for being new or innovative, but Sunsoft does manage to introduce some new and genuinely playable twists to the standard action/shooting theme. Nothing incredible, but a nice game . . . All of the qualities of a decent shooter are here: challenging gameplay, a decent variety of backgrounds, and a good difficulty curve . . . Killer bosses and a jammin' soundtrack are high points." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"You're constantly being barraged by enemies and their projectiles, and their placement makes it tough to avoid taking damage . . . There's a lot to pay attention to, and it can be tough when the screen is particularly cluttered . . .brings some pretty cool ideas to the table. For example, the opening stage has guns in the background that fire, and eventually their shots rain down on the playing field. Level five features conveyor belts with boxes dropped on to them. There's even a forced scrolling stage that unfortunately requires some intricate platforming . . . The graphics here are pretty good by NES standards . . .surprisingly colorful . . . Enemy designs are frequently repeated, but they're pleasant enough . . . Some may be turned off by this title's short length." —Infinity Retro (infinityretro.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: *Journey to Silius* was yet another side-scrolling run-and-gun platformer on a system that had plenty of those already. So why did I pick this one up? The cover art. I know—buying a game because the box looks neat is a rookie mistake, and I certainly knew better at this point in my gaming life. But . . .just LOOK at it—an actual game screen superimposed over the art. It looks cool as hell. The graphics have a crisp and realistic look, which is difficult to pull off with the NES color palette. Also it's clearly a sci-fi theme, which makes it even more alluring.

I snagged it and brought it home, and was promptly in for a surprise. It wasn't the graphics that surprised me (they're good—just look at the cover) or the gameplay (solid, if not the most original). Rather, it was the music. This isn't the only NES game to have good music, obviously. Even the simple *Super Mario Bros.* theme is so iconic and so much a part of the game it's hard to play without the sound on. And I'm not embarrassed to say that I bopped my head right along to the music of *Ninja Gaiden*, *Mega Man 2*, and many others. But the music in *Journey to Silius* downright rocks. Seriously, I've blasted this soundtrack in my car on the way home from work. The hard-driving beat keeps you playing what is a fun, but sometimes brutally challenging game. I have to recommend *Journey to Silius*—just turn that volume up! —Matt Daley, co-host of the Atari 5200 Super Community podcast

Joust

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988

In *Joust* you control a lance-wielding knight as he rides a flying ostrich. You control your ostrich with the d-pad, but flapping the bird's wings requires repeatedly tapping a button. To win each joust your lance must be positioned above that of your opponent's. If two lances meet at the same height both riders will bounce back unharmed. After losing a joust the enemy turns into an egg, which will either disappear into the lava at the bottom of the screen or land on one of the suspended platforms on the non-scrolling playing field. If the egg falls on a platform you must grab it before it hatches into a new, more powerful rider. Beware the pterodactyls, which must be met head on (but are better avoided), and the Troll of the Lava Pits, who lurks below and can reach up and pluck the player's ostrich out of the air. While this is a nice port of Williams' brilliant arcade classic from 1982, it does have slightly downgraded visuals, weaker sound effects, and superfluous intro music. It's also missing the "survival wave" levels.

Memories: By the time *Joust* hit the NES in 1988—the same year as *Contra* and *Super Mario Bros. 2*—it seemed like an ancient relic; however, I was glad to see it, since I loved the game in the arcades, especially against another player. My son Ryan, who records my *Tales from a Retro Gamer* YouTube show, has gotten better than me at a lot of games, but I can still destroy him at *Joust*.

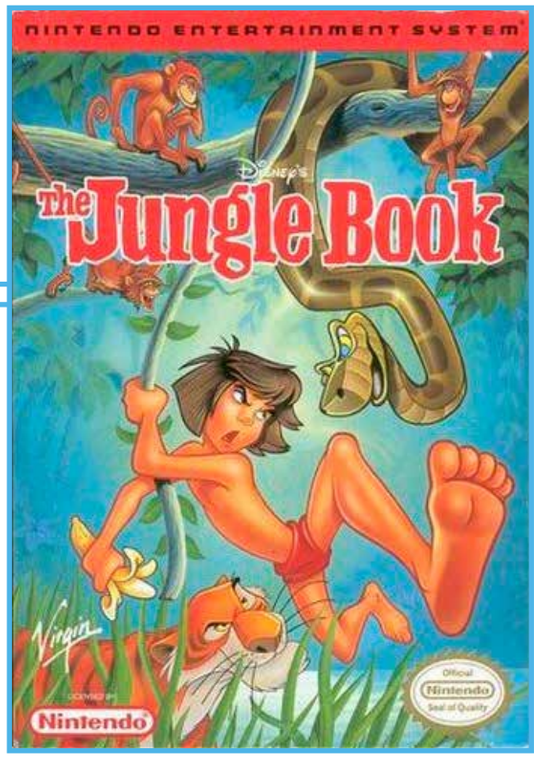
Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are well-rounded . . .with a nice mix of brown and bright, contrasting colors . . . The title screen music has a quaint medieval flair . . .boring sound effects. It beats the bleeps and bloops of the Atari 2600 version, but honestly it isn't much better . . .controls don't seem to be as tight as the arcade, and it can be mildly annoying and repetitive to constantly tap the A button to stay in flight. Otherwise the game plays well, and once players grow accustomed to the smaller NES controllers it's pure fun." —David Buck (nintendotimes.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Control in *Joust* is all about how easily you can control your winged beast of burden and, for me, the advantage in this category goes to the Atari 2600 port. The bird in that version seems to be faster and less prone to collision with a platform than its NES counterpart, which means less bouncing around and less potential of inadvertently getting killed by an opponent. Both the NES and Atari 2600 ports are fine versions of *Joust*, and there's no doubt that the NES take is very close to the arcade original in terms of graphics. However, the Atari 2600 wins by a tip of a feather in terms of fun and overall enjoyability." —Woodgrain Wonderland (woodgrainwonderland.com)

OSCHIFER PUBLISHING

The Jungle Book

PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive
DEVELOPER: Eurocom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1994



Guide man-cub Mowgli as he works his way through the jungle and to the village, throwing bananas at monkeys, jumping from crocodiles, snakes, scorpions, and other enemies along the way. Weapon power-ups include double-power bananas, boomerang bananas, a pea shooter, and a mask of invulnerability. In addition to battling baddies Mowgli swings on vines, jumps on platforms, bounces on see-saws (to reach high areas), dodges spikes and falling rocks, and more. The fun, nicely illustrated, side-scrolling action exhibits plenty of vertical scrolling to allow Mowgli to scale trees and cliffs and otherwise explore all the areas of each level. The objective in each non-linear level is to collect a certain number of gems before time runs out, but this can be difficult because some gems are hidden or are difficult to reach. Based on Disney's 1967 feature film, which was inspired by Rudyard Kipling's "Mowgli" stories.

Memories: *The Jungle Book* is much harder to find than most Disney titles because it was released late in the life of the NES. I don't even remember seeing it in stores. Around this time I was pretty much ignoring NES games—at least new releases—in favor of the Genesis and Super Nintendo.

Notable Quotable:

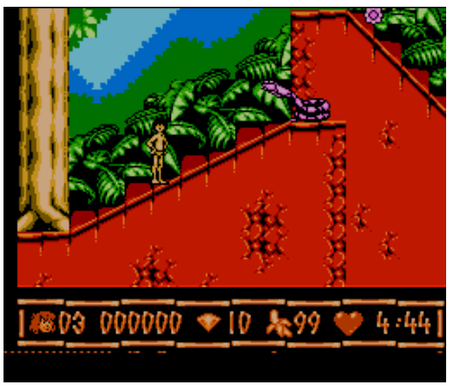
"Basically follows the storyline of the movie . . .definitely deserves a look . . . Play control is good, and Mowgli's movements are well-animated and well-defined." —*Nintendo Power* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Sure, it's slow, but this book has an easygoing charm (and a pretty easy challenge) that'll make it appeal to young gamers. Older players will probably give it a read, but it's doubtful they'll give it a prime spot in their library." —*GamePro* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

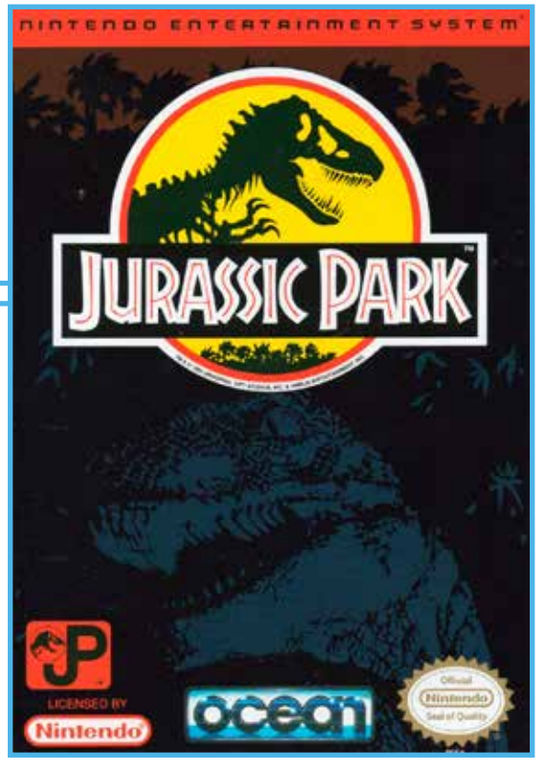
"This is the NES? Where did that animation come from? Seriously now, I've never seen an NES game that looks or plays like this game does! There are loads of items to use and the levels themselves are very challenging. However, you really have to be precise in the timing of jumps or it's a long way to the bottom. The music is decent for an NES game as well. One of the best buys for the NES out there." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1994)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Jurassic Park

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter/Adventure, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1993



The first video game based on the property, *Jurassic Park* for the NES turns Steven Spielberg's 1993 film into a fairly satisfying, though difficult, shooter/adventure game. Players guide paleontologist Dr. Alan Grant as he runs around shooting and bombing dinosaurs while avoiding sparks, electrified gates, volcanic craters, and other obstacles. Grant will also travel up river on an inflatable raft, collect dinosaur eggs to earn pass cards for entering buildings and accessing computer terminals, guide Tim Murphy (John Hammond's grandson) through a Triceratops stampede, and more. Watch out, because dinosaurs can jump out at you from behind bushes and trees. Mystery boxes you can grab contain continues, extra lives, and power-ups, but watch out, some will make you lose a life. There are six levels of play: Triceratops Stampede, T-Rex Confrontation, Restore Computer Power, The Raptor Nests, Radio the Mainland, and Escape the Island.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"What *Jurassic Park* lacks in originality and variety it more than makes up for in cosmetics and pace—a good, straightforward action game." —*Total!* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

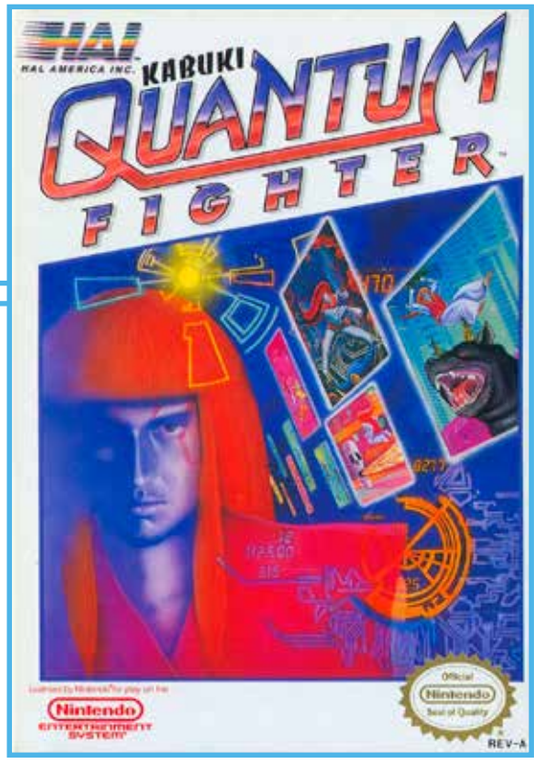
"Fantastic introduction and great music (even though it's not the music from the film) . . . I love how the dinosaurs (even the tiny ones) explode into a puff of atomic smoke when you shoot them . . . The open world approach is interesting . . . Better than the SNES game." —Central Nerd Network (centralnerdnetwork.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are rendered in a cartoonish style, but some of the larger dinosaur bosses (like the T-Rex and Triceratops) look quite imposing . . .outdoor environments do a fine job recreating the high-tech fences and controls depicted in the film . . .indoor areas are less interesting . . . The controls are responsive, but aiming is tricky and your ammo is limited. A catchy musical number complements the crisp graphics. I like the general concept of the game, but it's tainted by a few idiotic design decisions . . .many of the 'mystery boxes' turn out to be traps that spell instant death, and you'll only know which ones are deadly through trial and error. There's also too much computer terminal interaction which really slows things down . . .the difficulty level is so steep that even surviving the first stage is a major feat . . .a bit too frustrating for my tastes." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Kabuki-Quantum Fighter

PUBLISHER: HAL America
DEVELOPER: Human Entertainment
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



In the year 2056, Earth's defense computer has been infected by a virus, and it is up to the Quantum Fighter to save the [illegible] converted to raw data and transferred into the computer's circuits, which include such oddities as a river and imbedded monster faces, the hero must battle the infestation, which consists of tanks, robo roaches, flamethrowers, squawking heads, dart throwers, pit hounds, bouncing dinos, boomerangers, and other enemies. A whip-like Kabuki hair attack is the primary weapon, giving the game something of a *Castlevania* feel, but players, as the hero of the title, can also punch, kick, shoot fireballs, lob quantum bombs, and wield a fusion gun and a remote-control bolo. *Kabuki-Quantum Fighter*, which also evokes *Ninja Gaiden*, comprises six timed stages, most of which are fairly brief. The platforming action, featuring standard jumps as well as flips, includes such typical constructs as icy platforms, pop-up spikes, ladders, and conveyor belts. Watch out for transformers that zap your energy when you step on them.

Notable Quotable:

"Similar to *Shadow Warriors*. However, I found that this is actually smoother, slicker, and better looking, and it has more variety and challenge! Some of the baddies are really neat, and situations Kabuki gets himself into later in the game are great." —*Mean Machines* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"I wasn't too keen on this to start with. The smart graphics and the animation on Mr. Wig made it look nice, but it was just soooo difficult! A bit of perseverance taught me the error of my ways, though, and after a half-hour's play I was hooked. The programmers obviously know their stuff." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Incredible! The graphics and music are cool . . .an awesome variety of weapons and attacks . . .the acrobatic flips and techniques are mind-boggling . . .amazing control . . . Similar to *Gaiden*, but more intense. Cool bosses and power-ups . . .interesting storyline and continuous cinema-like intermissions . . .superb gameplay." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1991)

Insider Insight: I remember browsing the game section of my local video store back in the day and being struck by the bright white box for *Kabuki-Quantum Fighter*. In a sea of darker hued boxes this one called to me. I didn't know much about *Kabuki*, but that weird mash-up of cyberpunk and kung fu struck a chord. I started playing as soon as I got home and didn't stop all weekend. The world of *Kabuki-Quantum Fighter* made no sense to me then, and still really doesn't, but it didn't matter. At the time I felt like I was playing the evolution of action games. I felt mature and deep because I had found a game that none of my friends knew about but loved it when I showed it to them. I was completely caught up in the story of a man entering a computer to prevent nuclear destruction. I was a child of the '80s, after all; I knew the seriousness of a nuclear threat. I didn't finish the game that first weekend. The next weekend it wasn't there, so my decision was made: I would do the responsible thing and save my allowance to buy a copy for myself. And after what seemed like forever, I proudly marched into Toys 'R Us, purchased my copy, and saved the world. —Dan Ryan, co-host of the Stone Age Gamer podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Karate Champ

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1986

Karater Champ outfits you in traditional karate clothes, and you bow before fighting your opponent. You can pull off a variety of moves to try and down your foe, including punch, low punch, front kick, back kick, round kick, jumping kick, foot sweep, squat, block, and more. Rounds last 30 seconds, or until a fighter gets two points. As in many fighting games, *Karate Champ* employs a best-two-out-of-three format. At the end of each match, the victor enters a special bonus round in which knocking down flying objects earns extra points. There are nine fighting locations, each with different backgrounds, such as palm trees, cliffs, or a desert. In Data East's original arcade game from 1984, which was one of the earlier side-view, one-on-one fighting games, the action takes place in a gym and a stadium. Also, the arcade classic offered dual joystick control.

Notable Quotable:

"This version is quite close to the arcade game, offering plenty of action in brightly colored surroundings. Unfortunately, the graphics are flat and two-dimensional. It's difficult to be too critical, however, since the coin-op's graphics are just as flat and it's still a popular game." —*Computer Entertainer* (January 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"Just because a game helped shape a genre doesn't always mean it's good. Sure, the likes of *Super Mario Bros.* and *Tetris* are timeless classics that remain entertaining even today, but not all influential games are so lucky. Look for no further proof than *Karate Champ*, a title which helped shape the fighting genre in its early days, before *Street Fighter* added depth and fun to the genre . . . Simply put, you can't control *Karate Champ*. You can press buttons, and the character will react, but there seems to be no rhyme or reason behind the action the character decides to make." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

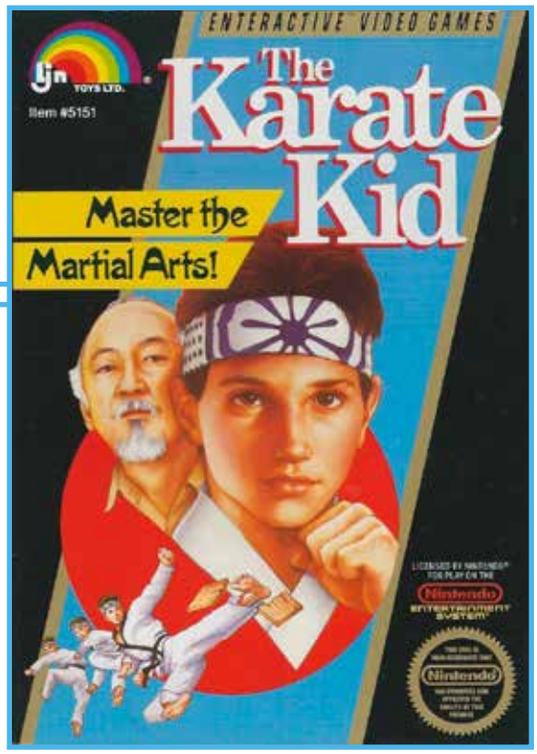
Insider Insight: In the early years of the NES it seemed that all my neighborhood friends had the console. Meanwhile, I was content with my Sega Master System and Mattel Intellivision. Besides, if I wanted to play an NES game it gave me an excuse to venture around the block. My friend Scott had two games initially: *The Legend of Zelda* and *Karate Champ*. The latter is a port of the Data East arcade title—the one featured in the movie *Bloodsport*. Unfortunately, the NES version was plagued with laggy, ambiguous controls and poor hit detection. Scott and I didn't care. We had already beaten *Zelda*, so *Karate Champ* was our only remaining option at the time.

Another thing that served as a big motivator for playing the game was the back of the box. There were two screenshots—one of a character performing a cool dropkick and another of a fighter taking on a huge charging bull. We were hooked! Scott and I figured this was some sort of bonus round similar to the one where flower pots are hurled at you from off screen that you were tasked with dodging. We vested massive amounts of time into finding the elusive bull, only to give up in complete frustration after countless attempts. Decades later, I discovered there was no bull dodging mini-game in the NES version of *Karate Champ*. The image was just an artist's rendition of a screenshot based on the arcade version. I call major bulls****! —Brian 'CIVICMINDED' Lesyk, co-host of the Pass The Controller gaming show

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Karate Kid

PUBLISHER: LJN
DEVELOPER: Atlus
GAME TYPE: Fighting/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous)
YEAR: 1987



The Karate Kid
PUSH START BUTTON
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Incorporating scenes from the first two *Karate Kid* movies, *The Karate Kid* features two types of gameplay: one-on-one fighting and side-scrolling combat. The action begins with the final moments of the original *The Karate Kid* (1984) as Daniel-San battles the Cobra Kai in a four-round, one-on-one tournament, and the final scene is a confrontation against Chozen from the end of *The Karate Kid, Part II* (1986). The game takes you through four stages. In the first, Karate Tournament, you punch and kick your foe in standard fighting fashion, but are also given four of Danny's patented crane kicks. Over the course of the next three side-scrolling stages—Daniel-San in Okinawa, The Typhoon Strikes, and Summer Festival—you'll jump on platforms, battle gusting winds and torrential rains, avoid flying sticks and birds, and punch and kick a steady stream of enemies, including some who carry spears. You'll also attempt to rescue Kamiko, who Chozen holds hostage. Bonus stages, which you access by entering doors, find Daniel dodging a swinging hammer, breaking ice blocks, and catching flies with chopsticks. These let you win crane kicks and drum punches.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the few movie-based NES games that manages to capture the spirit of the film it's based on. Even if you didn't enjoy the old flick with Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita, you're still bound to become addicted . . . Despite its control flaws I had a great time playing *Karate Kid*. It requires more technique and offers more variety than your typical side-scroller." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"No one was even wearing black and yellow to denote the Cobra Kai fighters, so I presume you're just fighting some random guys . . .just a way to make some money on a franchise that was two movies in at the time . . . Unforgiving gameplay and shoddy play mechanics make this game a surefire miss. If you want to kick some butt with your bare hands I suggest playing through *Kung Fu* instead." —BrutalGamer (brutalgamer.com)

Insider Insight: I was extremely late to the *Karate Kid* party. I didn't see the movies until I was well into my twenties; however, I played the ever-loving heck out of the NES game. My neighbor had it, and it was one of the first NES games I ever played. When I finally got an NES console of my own I spent most my time trying to master *Super Mario Bros.*, but when that frustrated me I borrowed *Karate Kid* from my neighbor. I know folks tend to hate on LJN's stuff, but *Karate Kid* is a fun game. It's also much easier to beat than *Super Mario Bros.*, and as such became the first video game I ever finished. Amusingly enough, I didn't know at the time that the game was mostly based on the second *Karate Kid* movie, so when I finally got around to seeing *The Karate Kid* I was reasonably confused by the lack of typhoons, swinging hammers, and breakable ice blocks. —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

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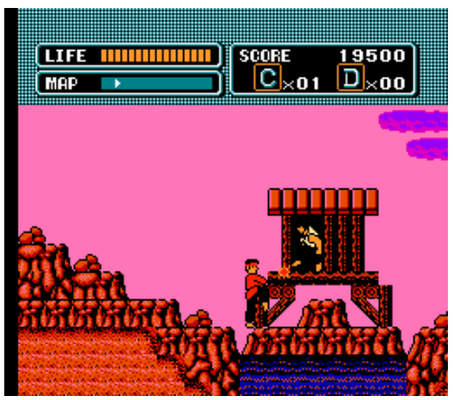
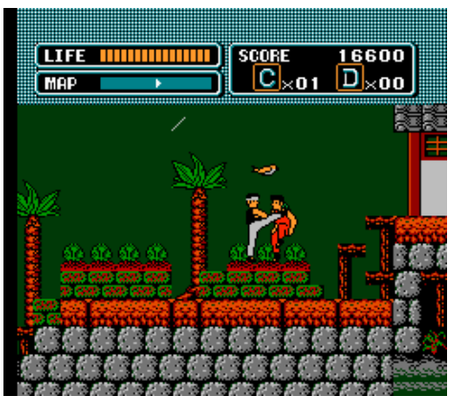




Karnov

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1988

A solid action title, *Karnov* for the NES is a nice port of Data East's 1987 arcade game, but it does have some differences. The title character, a circus strongman, can take two hits instead of just one. Levels four through eight have been redesigned, and the final boss is a three-headed dragon instead of a wizard. Gameplay is essentially the same, as Karnov runs, jumps, and shoots (single, double, and triple fireballs) his way through nine levels of soldiers, demons, gargoyles, pigeons, tricky platforms, and other enemies and obstacles, including Lion Keeper, Snake Woman, and Rock Man. Throughout the game Karnov can collect such helpful items as boots (double jumping power), boomerangs, wings (flying), a shield, a swimming mask (go faster underwater), and ladders (avoid enemy attacks, reach items positioned in high places). He can also grab bombs to defeat enemies, and to destroy certain obstacles and walls. His ultimate goal is to retrieve the Lost Treasure of Babylon and defeat the evil Ryu (a huge dragon, not the *Street Fighter* character).

Memories: I bought *Karnov* when it was new in stores, thinking it looked like a straightforward action game with some shooter and adventure elements. I was right and enjoyed many hours with the game. A Russian circus strongman wasn't my ideal image for a protagonist (I might prefer a marine, a superhero, or a ninja), but the burly, bald badass grew on me, as he was quite formidable and fun to control.

Notable Quotable:

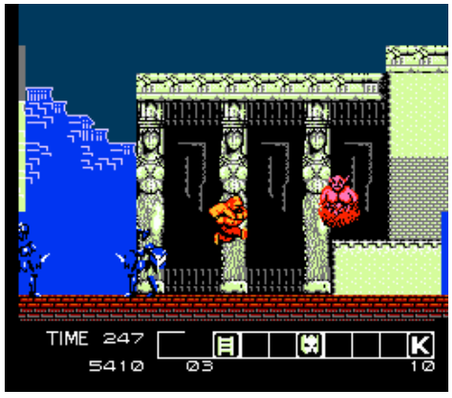
"Full of surprises . . .you will want to play this one again and again . . .highly challenging, imaginatively programmed, graphically interesting, and just plain fun to play." —*Computer Entertainer* (February 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"The NES version was made considerably easier by adding a feature allowing the character to be hit once before he dies. Still, *Karnov* requires plenty of skill if you are going to get through its nine stages in one piece." —*Game Informer* (March 2001)

Notable Quotable:

"Great music and sound effects—with the exception of Karnov's fireballs. They sound like radio static . . .some of the best graphics around . . .imaginative scenery and bizarre monsters, all drawn with exceptional detail (right down to the Lizard Man's tiny scales). With unlimited continues progress is possible in *Karnov*, but it usually comes only after playing each stage many times . . .a great arcade game . . . No matter how many times I've played it, it's always fun to come back to." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)



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Kick Master

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: KID
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

As Kick Master you begin this game with only three types of fighting moves, but as you progress through the game, which takes you through the Witches' Forest, Cavern of No Return, and Belzed's Fiery Stronghold, you can add an assortment of fun and easy combat maneuvers to your repertoire. The controls are virtually flawless, making such moves as sliding kicks, double front kicks, double butterfly kicks, and blazing flip kicks a breeze to pull off. In addition to fighting skills, Kick Master can acquire (in stages and after boss fights) such magic powers as bouncing bulbs (fire balls), magic boots (for walking on otherwise deadly surfaces), lightning, earthquakes, harpy flying (flight), pulse waves, force shields, and tyrin power (a shadow decoy). The game also has RPG-like qualities, in which collecting coins raises the player's experience points, which in turn increases maximum hit and magic points. Enemies you'll encounter include bats, frogs, grim reapers, big-eyed monsters, purple blobs, rat soldiers, karate soldiers, the Lizard Warrior, and Druilla the Witch. Hidden areas to explore and vertically scrolling sections add to the fun.

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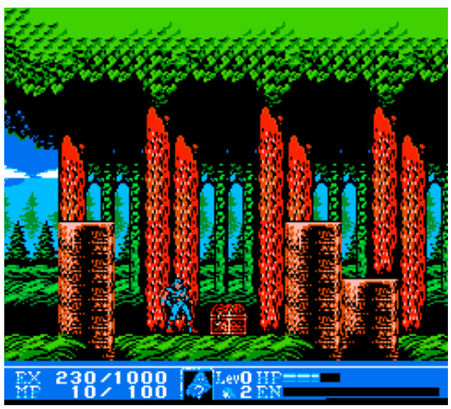
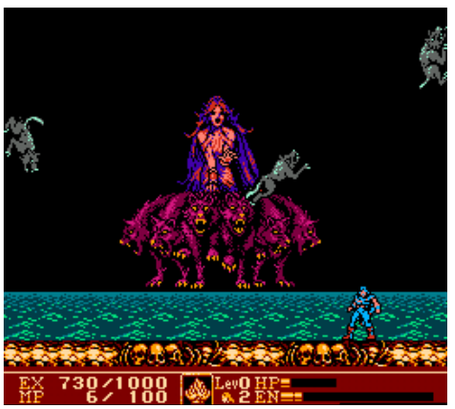
Notable Quotable:

"Although not the best of the NES best, the stages are generally good-looking and the music keeps your fast feet company . . . If *Kick Master* sounds similar to most NES side-scrolling martial arts offerings, you're right. But that doesn't mean it's not great! The challenge pushed the fast-and-furious needle almost off the scale, but that's cool, because you get unlimited continues and passwords. While the characters are a bit smallish, the gameplay, reminiscent of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Shatterhand*, is A-okay." — *GamePro* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The enemies are simple but diverse . . .unique and memorable settings. Backgrounds feature solid attention to detail, with cool imagery and unique color schemes that give every area a personality of its own. I particularly enjoyed the aesthetic of the game's swamp stage. Here, a shimmering orange pond sits below a crimson sky. You traverse the tall green grass in the foreground, battling hordes of demonic creatures. The atmosphere is striking, with a forlorn beauty that's uncommon for an NES game . . . The controls are tight and intuitive. Attacks are easy to execute, both on the ground and in the air. You're afforded a lot of control when you jump, making even precision landings easy to perform. That said, as your arsenal of kicks begins to grow it becomes increasingly easy to accidentally use the wrong one. These mistakes are usually harmless, but can be critical when working around death pits or lots of enemies . . . Technical issues crop up from time to time, marring the otherwise slick action. Hit detection is often shaky, resulting in phantom damage for both you and your enemies . . .a fun and competent action game without the polish of larger, more well-known titles." —Game Luster (gameluster.com)





Kickle Cubicle

PUBLISHER: Irem
DEVELOPER: Irem
GAME TYPE: Maze/Action Puzzle, 1 player
YEAR: 1990

Viewed from a top-down perspecti... *Kickle Cubicle* is a charming maze puzz... ring a baby-faced fellow who walks arc... zen fantasy lands (Garden, Fruit, Cake, and Toy) rescuing innocents trapped in dream bags. Kickle can freeze cutesy enemy creatures into ice cubes and kick them into the water to create ice pathways to otherwise unreachable areas. As the game progresses and enemies begin moving in patterns where it's not as easy to freeze and push them where you need them to go, Kickle can strategically create little ice pillars to block and redirect them. Enemies include such characters as Myrtle the turtle, who uses her shell like a drill; and the Equalizer, who shoots cannon balls. Additional elements, including hammers (which turn cubes and knock enemies away), springs (which bounce cubes across the screen), and rocks (which stop cubes), fill the game with strategic challenges. The objective is to save the citizens of Fantasy Kingdom from the Wicked Wizard King.

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Notable Quotable:

"It is a great strategy game combining the block-kicking entertainment of the old game *Pengo* with strategy similar to that found in *Lolo*." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:

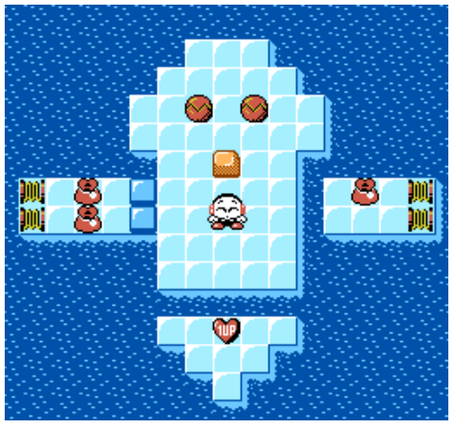
"*Kickle Cubicle* is designed mainly for younger Nintendo players. But thanks to its tricky puzzles and cute graphics it may end up as a favorite of the whole family." —*Game Players* (September 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"*Kickle Cubicle* is an almost-brilliant game which is sadly let down by a few annoying flaws. It's fun to play and is very addictive at first, with the simplistic gameplay providing very entertaining, medium-paced puzzle-solving antics. However, the challenge never really appears, and with very little practice you're able to get miles into the game—and the infinite continues let even the biggest video game idiot complete the game with ease! Puzzle fans will certainly enjoy *Kickle Cubicle*, but unfortunately, the enjoyment just doesn't last long enough." —*Mean Machines* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically, both versions have clean but simple visuals, opting more for visual distinction than artistic flair. For a tile-based puzzle game this is a good approach. Even with that, all of the game entities are cute and pleasant to look at, if a bit simple. Oddly, Kickle's arcade appearance had golden earmuffs for some reason, perhaps to match his flying cloud. When the NES versions came around they were made red to match his pants and balloon, which replaced the cloud. Audio wise the games are pleasant but not particularly notable . . . The NES version has more music . . . The arcade version has a tile area of 23×14 while the NES version only has 15×13 to offer. This results in many of the levels from the arcade version needing to be pruned down and simplified." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Kid Icarus

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1 / TOSE
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1987

Set during an era "when Gods and Man lived in harmony," *Kid Icarus* was an A-list title for the NES, but it never quite reached the heights of such household name games as *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda*. Unlike those two games, which are user friendly, *Kid Icarus* is frustratingly difficult, thanks in part to tricky platform jumps and the limitation of the titular angel's primary weapon, which fires short-range arrows. Depending on the level (Underworld, Overworld, Skyworld, or Palace in the Sky) the action scrolls horizontally or vertically (up only, meaning falling to your death is easy to do), with players shooting an assortment of oddball beasts and mythological creatures. Items, which include flaming arrows, mirror shields, protective crystals, and more, are hard to come by and are unusable if Kid Icarus is low on strength. Backgrounds are solid black, but the columns, creatures, and other visuals are nicely rendered. Along with *Metroid*, *Kid Icarus* was the first video game cartridge to include a password feature for saving progress.

Notable Quotable:

"A very versatile, moderately paced game with a unique concept . . . I actually wanted to go through this game again . . .even after all these years this game is still enjoyable to play. The graphics for their time were about as good as they get. The sound . . .is a little repetitive." —SwankWorld (www.swankworld.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A fun-filled adventure full of whimsical touches that will appeal to younger players. However, it's not at all childish, so older players can enjoy it too. Graphics are beautifully detailed with excellent animation. The music is equally good. And the game is just plain fun to play." —*Computer Entertainer* (September 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"Platforming adventure that captivated and frustrated. Particularly since you only had one life per stage and the Eggplant Wizard could cause fits. The side rooms where you could shop, heal, power-up, and pick up treasure provided plenty of action away from the fray. Some even were inspired enough to play through multiple times to get the different Medusa images at the end of this NES classic." —*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Kid Icarus* the 83rd greatest game of all time

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Insider Insight: Growing up, one of my favorite games was *Kid Icarus*. It was one of those games that all the cool older kids had, and I wanted to be just like them. My cousin, my babysitter, and my dad's best friend's son all had the game—I was just drawn to it.

Other than simply wanting it, the thing about *Kid Icarus* that truly affected me was the Eggplant King. I hated that guy with a passion every time I would go into one of the dungeon areas. I simply couldn't avoid the eggplants he threw at me and would eventually succumb to my fate of being an eggplant. As a child it seemed like it would take hours to find the medic to take it off my head.

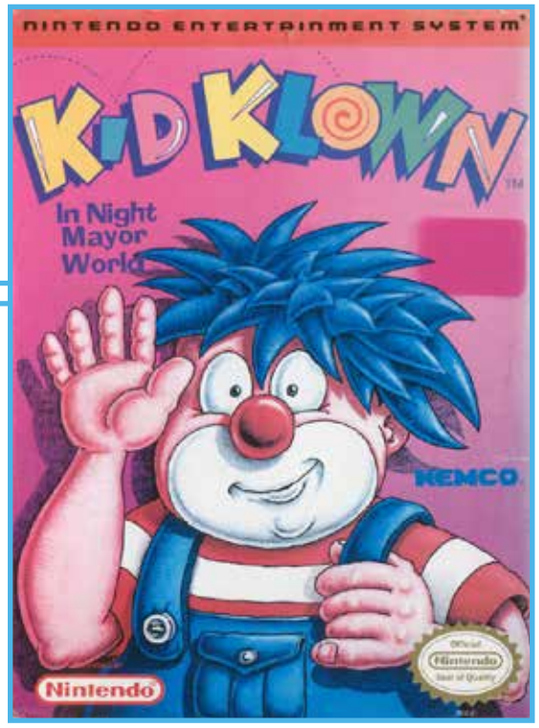
To this day I hate the character so much that I can't stand the idea of eating eggplant parmigiana. Funny thing is my mom is Italian, and I'm told she makes the best eggplant parmigiana around. Thanks a lot, Eggplant King! —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate, blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

Insider Insight: I had the *Mario* games, the *Zelda* games, the *Donkey Kong* games, *Metroid*, and many more. The World of Nintendo had become my favorite place to live. But there was one game that eluded me: *Kid Icarus*. I had seen the title character in *Captain N: The Game Master*. I had seen the game on all of the Now You're Playing with Power posters that came with my other games. It was even in my 1990 Nintendo The Power Game calendar. But the game itself was nowhere to be found. I never saw it in any stores and none of my rental shops carried it.

Then one day my mom and I took a ride out to a not-so-local game shop and there it was. I snagged it and enjoyed the long car ride home, poring over the instruction manual and all the amazing artwork inside. I had romanticized this game for what felt like an eternity at this point. It was the one piece of Nintendo's world I didn't have any experience with. There was no way it could possibly live up to my expectations . . .but it did! From Hip Tanaka's absolutely stellar music, to the tough-as-nails gameplay, to the weird sense of humor hiding just underneath the surface, *Kid Icarus* was everything I wanted it to be. Now if they would only make more of them! —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

Kid Klown in Night Mayor World

PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Kemco
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



The Night Mayor has "klown-napped" Kid Klown's family and you must rescue them. Released late in the life of the NES, *Kid Klown* is a typical side-scroller (run, duck, jump on platforms) with colorful graphics, charming music, and lighthearted gameplay. One unusual thing about the game is the weapon of choice wielded by the blue-haired protagonist: balloons. Not only can balloons be thrown (in eight directions) at the various fish, hedgehogs, snakes, bugs, snails, snowmen, witches, robots, tin soldiers, and other enemies (including such bosses as a cyclops and a giant owl), they also can be used to float, jump higher, and find hidden treasures and doors. Levels include Deadly Meadow, Terrible Toyland, Big Bad Beanstalk, Arctic Wasteland, and Candy World. At the end of each level, depending on how many strawberries he's picked up, Kid can play a bonus round in which you move an aiming cursor with the control pad and take aim and fire balloons at said cursor to shoot moving target items to earn energy and extra lives. Beating the game reveals a secret code for unlocking a harder mode of play. Originally a Mickey Mouse game in Japan (Capcom owned the North American license for Disney video games at the time), *Kid Klown* is one of the harder-to-find platformers for the console.

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Notable Quotable:

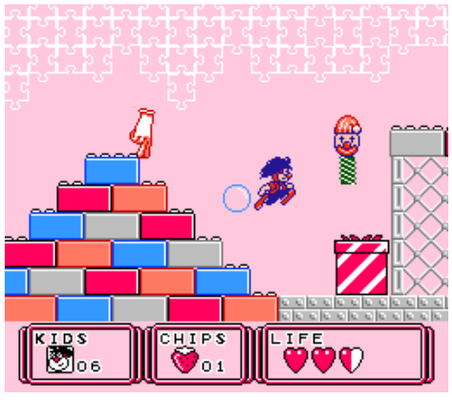
"The balloons are fun to use and make you very versatile. However, the levels don't take full advantage of your extra mobility . . . The Big Bad Beanstalk adds some verticality to the levels . . .otherwise there's not a ton of variety in the gameplay . . .stages 2 and 5, themed after toys and candy, are a garish mess of colors set against ugly pastel backgrounds . . . There's no consistent visual style . . . The game's performance is mostly good, but there are a couple of areas with tremendous slowdown and flickering . . . Short, simple, and relatively easy. It's worth spending an hour with to beat it once, but it doesn't give the player much of a reason to go back and replay it." —Cannot be Tamed (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The action heavy approach makes it feel like a cross between *Mega Man* and *Super Mario Bros.*, where you not only beat enemies with brute force, but can also use some ingenuity and agility to avoid enemies . . . The stages are surprisingly varied . . . Kid Klown may be an ugly character design, but the environments he inhabits can be quite beautiful . . . Musically, *Kid Klown* is not a top-shelf game. It does have a circus-y and whimsical sound to it, but none of it is memorable. It's all functional and works for the stage, but fails to evoke any kind of emotion. The sound effects fare a bit better, with enjoyable stuff for every type of balloon shot and different sounds for enemy kills." —Jeremy Peeples (www.hardcoregamer.com)

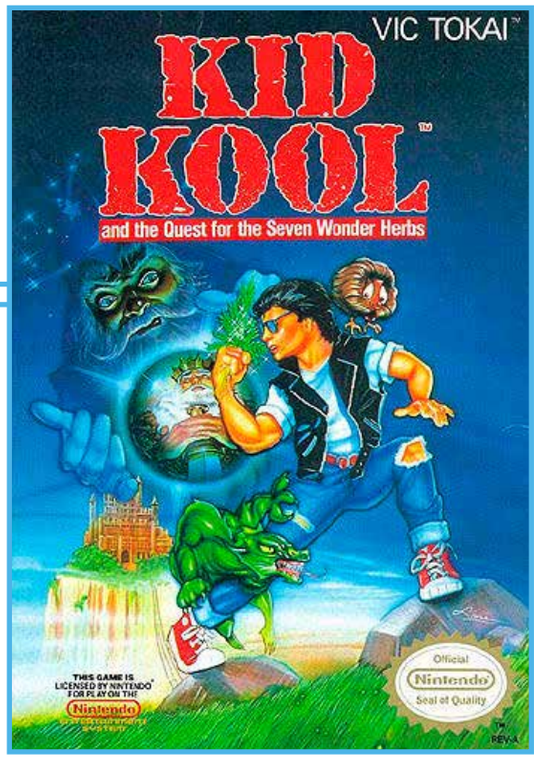
Notable Quotable:

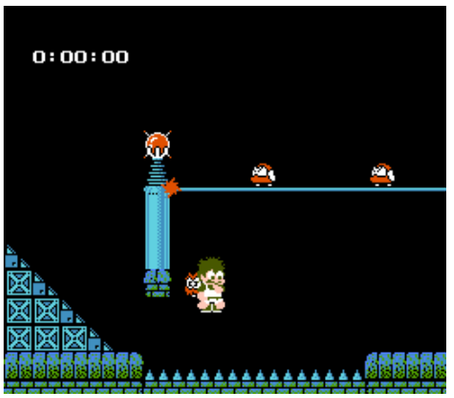
"A cute, forgettable, rudimentary platformer . . . one of a legion of mediocre side-scrollers that were released throughout the '80s and '90s that will likely be lost in the annals of gaming history." —Joseph Shaffer (www.honestgamers.com)



Kid Kool and the Quest for the Seven Wonder Herbs

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Vic Tokai
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990


VIC TOKAI
KID KOOL
and the Quest for the Seven Wonder Herbs
THIS GAME IS LICENSED BY NINTENDO FOR PLAY ON THE Nintendo
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality



The chubby, dorky-looking title character you control in *Kid Kool* looks nothing like the prototypical "cool kid" on the cartridge label and box. Regardless, he has a journey through seven quirkily named levels (Draguar, Mountain Bulb, Elegy, Aridian Desert, Cirus Cotton, Pippo's Heart, and Electra), running, jumping, pole vaulting, skipping on water, and battling such creatures as Caterpillar, Thunder Rap, Snapping Dragon, Wooly Sprite, Doorgnat, Hangman, and Synthetico (a robot). The Kid can jump on most of his enemies (sometimes twice is required), but his most effective weapon is Wicky, a short, two-legged, mop top little creature who frequently appears along the ground and can be picked up and thrown. Other helpful items give you extra time, bonus lives, temporary invincibility, and the ability to destroy every enemy on screen. There are many hazards along the way, including traps, falling bridges, pitfalls, and water. Like Sonic the Hedgehog, Kid skids when he comes to a running stop. Speaking of which, there's no run button—rather Kid gains speed the longer he is in motion. Kid's objective is to collect seven herbs to cure the ailing King Voldam the Fifth.

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Notable Quotable:

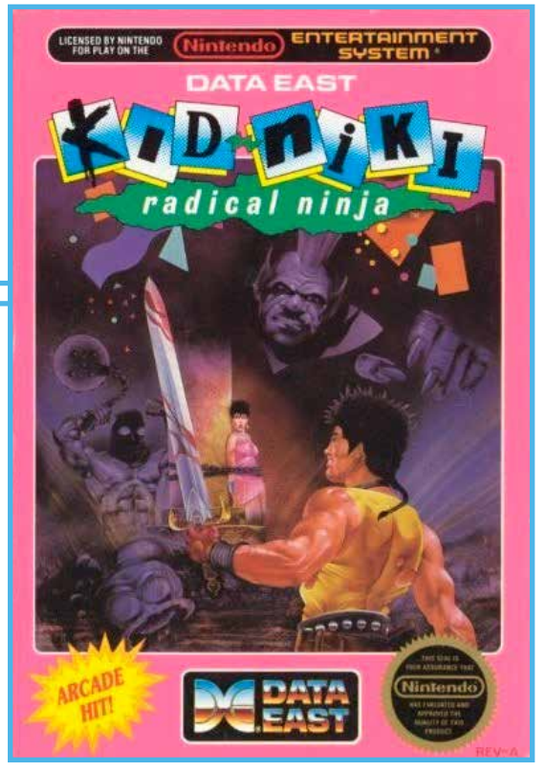
"*Kid Kool*'s action graphics have a certain whimsical quality about them and will appeal to players of all ages." —*Nintendo Power* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"A cool cover and catchy music can't redeem the utter failure of the platform game design . . . It's a game that demands speed and precision but gives room for neither, platform placement playing poorly with the screen limitations so there are plenty of cases where you can't build up the momentum needed to clear gaps, cases where you move onto a screen where you couldn't have seen what dangers lie ahead, and instant deaths always threatening Kid Kool to drag out a game that only has a timer so that it can justify wasting your time with annoying traps like the air vents. Having Wicky to throw can only free you of a few problems, as the bad play control, invisible money bags, and other minor nuisances mean that no moment in Kid Kool's adventure is truly enjoyable; you just end up cherishing the tolerable moments because they're a break from the many different ways you can get screwed over." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Kid Niki: Radical Ninja

PUBLISHER: Data East
DEVELOPER: TOSE
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987



Everything cool in the eighties was "radical," including *Kid Niki: Radical Ninja*, a game that uses such dated terminology as "wicked" and employs such side-scrolling staples as rescuing the protagonist's girlfriend, jumping over water-filled gaps, and jumping on rock platforms that move up and down. The game is truly a product of its time. Players guide the spike-haired hero through seven cartoonish stages (mountains, valleys, forests, caves, a temple, and a castle), using a spinning sword to battle birds, foxes, masked devils, flying kites, and other standard enemies, along with such memorable bosses as Death Breath and Stone Buddha. Helpful items you can use include golden bells for killing enemies far away, silver bells that circle around you and knock out enemies, and more. Despite spotty collision detection during boss fights, *Kid Niki* can be beaten within a half hour by most anyone with some degree of platforming experience. It's a fun game, though, and does a nice job of imitating the arcade original Irem released in 1988.

Memories: *Kid Niki* was one of the first games I owned for the NES, and after I beat it and *Super Mario Bros.* in fairly quick fashion, I figured I was an NES master. Over the next year or two I discovered that the console had plenty of brutally hard games, such as *Contra* (which I did eventually beat because I played it so much), *Ghosts 'n Goblins* (which I guess I'll never beat), and *Ninja Gaiden*.

Notable Quotable:
"*Kid Niki* is a charming and modestly challenging game with gobs of Oriental atmosphere. The monsters are wonderfully designed and quite innovative." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"If running/jumping/shooting contests are to your taste you will enjoy *Kid Niki*. One does have to wonder, though, how many of these interchangeable games Nintendo will authorize. Even devotees must be getting tired of the same game in different disguises." —*Computer Gaming World* (September 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Ah, Kid Niki, with your crazy hair and your even wackier spinning sword . . . While *Niki* is a game that hasn't aged as well as titles like *Super Mario Bros.*, if you grew up with it, as I did, the nostalgia factor has you covered. Simple, straightforward side-scrolling action, lots of baddies to send flying off the screen with a quick swipe of your blade, and stylish graphics for its time. —Matt Casamassina (via www.ign.com), IGN Nintendo Editor-in-Chief

Notable Quotable:
"I had my reservations about revisiting *Kid Niki*. I remember it fondly, but also recognize that it is a bit simple . . . *Kid Niki* is not a lost classic, but is at least above average . . .a solid second-string title." —Classic-Games.Net (www.classic-games.net)

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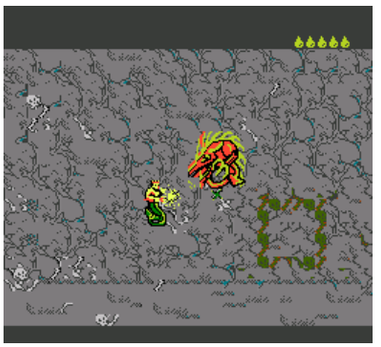
King Neptune's Adventure

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



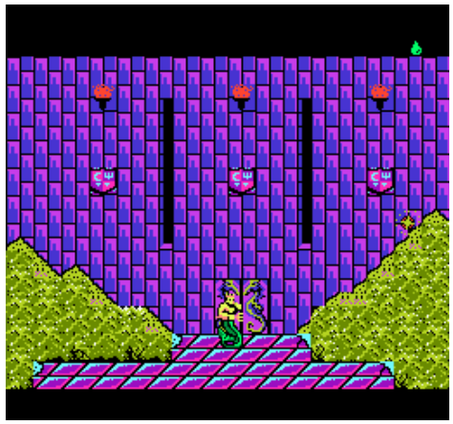
King Neptune's Adventure has gamers guiding the legendary merman as he endeavors to retrieve a stolen orb and explore valuable treasures. The good king swims up, down, right, and left, shooting bouncing light shots at enemies. He also detonates bubble bombs, collects sea horses (for extra lives), dodges enemies and their projectiles, and kills stingrays (to refill health). There are nine levels to journey through—King's Castle, The Maze, Open Ocean, Sunken Ship, Deep Sea, Dark Castle, Volcano, Atlantis, and Inner Chamber—each filled with such creatures as piranhas, jellyfish, crabs, dragons, and sharks. Some exploration is involved, and players must grab keys to open specific doors. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

"Poorly executed adventure/shooter that gets points only for being different . . . The game is set underwater, so you can move Neptune anywhere on the screen, but it's hard to explore the environments without being subject to cheap hits and poor collision detection. The graphics are more detailed than most Color Dreams releases, but there's very little animation, giving the overall game a static, low-rent feel." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

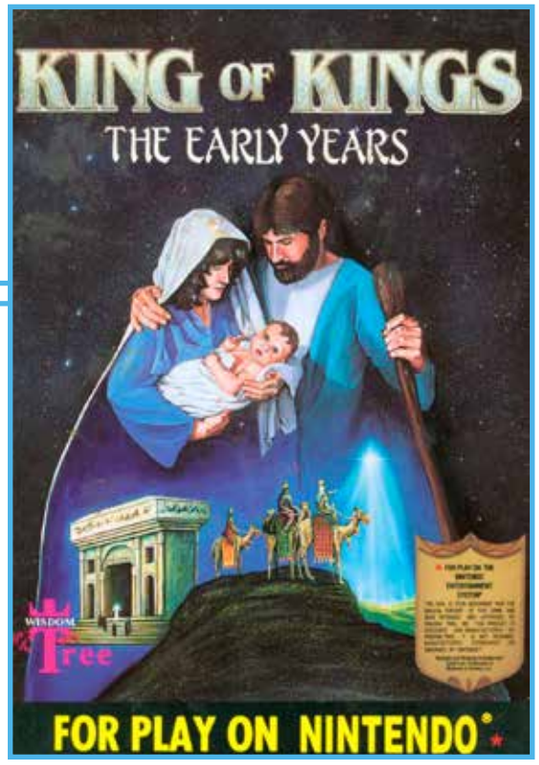
"The lightning bolt is worthless against anything other than smaller enemies and you have a limited amount of bubble bombs. The latter wouldn't be so bad if bubble bombs weren't crucial to your advancement . . . They're needed for boss fights and to blow through certain sections, and while you can get more by destroying enemies, they're too few and far between . . . Enemies literally emerge from nowhere onto King Neptune, causing him damage . . .the green and red background clash with the green and red enemies who vomit green and red projectiles. I didn't know how I was getting hit half the time." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

King of Kings: The Early Years

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree
DEVELOPER: Wisdom Tree
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



One of several religious titles from Wisdom Tree, *King of Kings: The Early Years* is divided into three selectable stages centered around the New Testament story of Jesus when he was but a wee lad: The Wise Men, in which players ride a surprisingly agile camel while collecting gifts for baby Jesus; Flight to Egypt, where Joseph and Mary take baby Jesus to Egypt on a surprisingly nimble donkey that is equipped with a hind-leg kick attack; and Jesus and the Temple, which finds Jesus' parents looking for him. Depending on the level, the game has players: avoiding creatures (such as bees, scorpions, bats, mice, hopping fish, and egg-dropping birds); dodging falling objects (rocks, ice, spikes, and the like); jumping on ledges and platforms; navigating falling and disintegrating platforms; shooting water balls and kicking enemies; and jumping over polar bears, chasms, and other obstacles. By picking up scroll icons you can answer health-replenishing Bible trivia. Includes perky renditions of "We Three Kings," "Go Tell it on the Mountain," and "What Child is This?" Unlicensed and hard to find.

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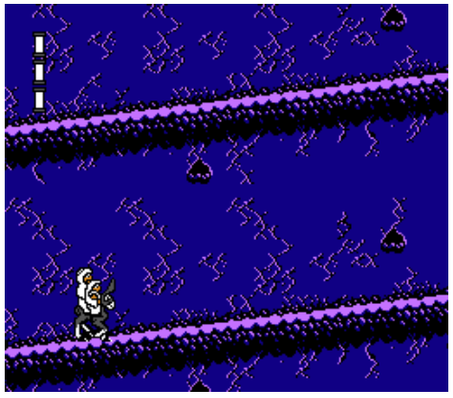
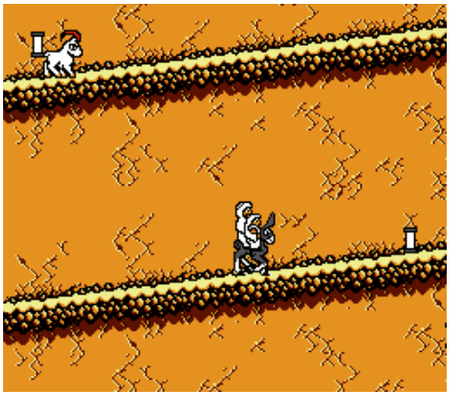
Notable Quotable:

"The best of Wisdom Tree's Biblical releases . . .a solid collection of three platform games . . . The graphics are simple but surprisingly attractive, showing quite a bit more depth than Wisdom Tree's other games. The music is equally impressive . . . The gameplay is basic but challenging and varied enough to keep it interesting." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"One of Wisdom Tree's finest efforts, even if still not quite a spectacular video game . . .fairly basic platformers, each representing a simple goal with little flair or extras to accompany the tedious action . . .although these are Bible games they are not the most kid-friendly, as most children would eventually get frustrated at trying to complete these . . . Its large, colorful sprites and weirdly impressive backgrounds (well, in certain spots), along with detailed level designs, put *King of Kings* far ahead of many other 8-bit titles on the NES . . .at times the movement is somewhat choppy, stilted, and not as smooth as a player would want, even glitching out in crazy ways at times . . .a distinctive NES game in terms of its soundtrack, in that it shows points of brilliance right alongside points of head-scratching oddity . . . Jerky movements, unresponsive controls, and a premise that may make some gamers uncomfortable . . .on the scale of NES platformers this is a smack-dab center title on the spectrum." —Eric Bailey (obsoletegamer.com)





King's Knight

PUBLISHER: Square
DEVELOPER: Workss
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

If you just look at the box and a few screenshots, you might think *King's Knight* is a role-playing game. It's actually a forced-scrolling shooter, with players controlling Ray Jack the Knight, Kaliva the Wizard, Barusa the Monster, and Toby the Thief (one at a time) over mountains, towns, and islands, firing away at creatures and dodging their projectiles. Not only that, you'll shoot environmental obstacles like rocks, statues, trees, mushrooms, fences, and even mountains, towns, and islands to clear them from the screen. Each character has his own stage to battle through, and each has unique powers. Ray is strong, moves quickly, and uses a sword. Kaliva fires magic and jumps well. Barusa breathes fire and has thick scales for a strong defense. Toby throws a dagger and is fast. Magical elements, which are hidden in the first four areas, are important for making it through the fifth and final level, where the characters band together and fight as a team. Standard power-ups include higher jumps, speed, shields, and firing strength. Walking over "up" arrows adds to your health while walking over "down" arrows zaps your health.

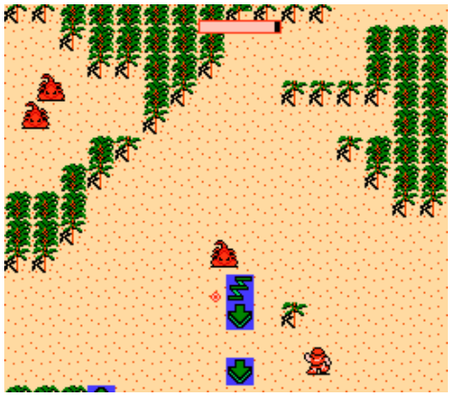
SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

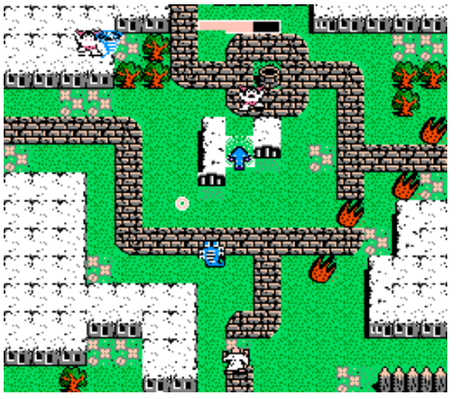
Notable Quotable:

"Brings fresh ideas to the table . . .unique shooter with really clever gameplay. How many action games out there get you to individually power-up your characters before rushing into the final battle? This really gives *King's Knight* a bit more depth than its peers. Technically the game is fairly decent, and controls are solid and responsive. The screen can be a bit chaotic at times, though, filled with hordes of crawling monsters and other flying enemies." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Enemies have an annoying tendency to appear from out of nowhere . . .your weapons have the ability to destroy scenery, and in doing so you not only reveal power-ups but also hostile creatures, which then waste no time in running towards you and inflicting almost unavoidable damage. This is unbelievably irritating, because you often find yourself in an inescapable position thanks to the fact that you happened to shoot a nearby wall . . .the soundtrack is actually pretty decent, but the visuals are terrible. Your heroes mince about like they've got a bunch of pineapples stuck down their codpieces, and to call the enemy design bland would be doing it a favor. *King's Knight* is, at best, a brave attempt to try to fuse the vertical shooter with the RPG genre. At its worst it's a poorly designed and ultimately frustrating mess that really isn't worth any of your time. Don't be suckered in by the credentials of the developer." —Damien McFerran (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii





Kings of the Beach: Professional Beach Volleyball

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball, 1–4 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

A quality title, *Kings of the Beach* has bright, detailed graphics that include onlookers, beachcombers, oceanic backgrou[illegible] and a nice side view of the court and pla[illegible] there are three types of serves (underhan[illegible] and jump) and a variety of moves, including bump shots, spikes, blocks (including a special Kong block), feints, and dives. To brush up on your skills you can enter practice courts where a coach will set up shots for you. When you're ready you can play a single game against up to four other gamers or enter a world tournament for one or two players. The two-on-two action, which is designed to mimic the playing styles of pros Sinjin Smith and Randy Stoklos, is accessible and fun.

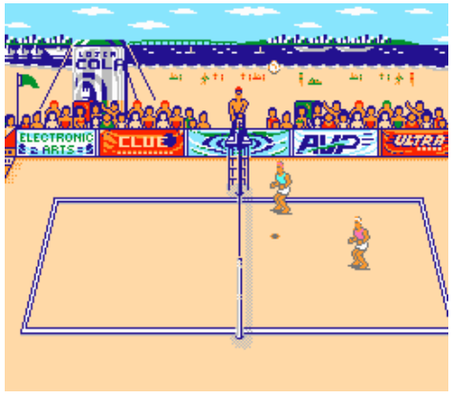
Characters from *Ski or Die* and *Skate or Die!* (two other games from Ultra) appear as players, and you can even argue bad calls. The game has five stages: Coronado Beach, San Diego; Oak Street Beach, Chicago; Waikiki Beach, Hawaii; Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro; and the Great White Beach, Australia.

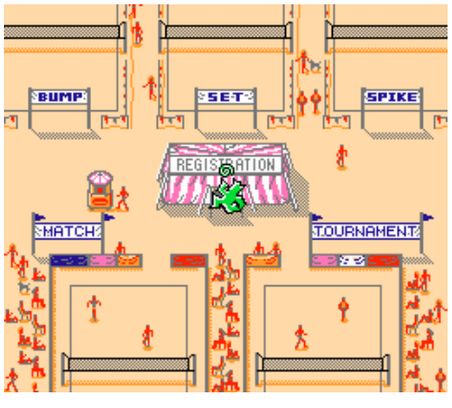
Notable Quotable:

"Arrange with friends and a real sweaty-palms contest against the computer . . . The animation is brilliant. The only problem with the graphics is occasional difficulty seeing the ball in perspective. If a player on the near side of the court hits the ball over the net it's not always immediately clear whether the ball is on the near side or has slanted toward the far side (where the referee is sitting) . . .you can turn off the horrible music, leaving only the very good sound effects . . .the dives are automatic; if you could control them the simulation would be perfect." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"There are no power-ups, no crazy attacks, and no slo-mo balls catching on fire. It's just volleyball. That's it. And it's amazing . . . Figuring up how to best set up your partner for a spike is tricky, but extremely rewarding when you pull it off . . .controls well . . .animations are very fluid and everything is easily distinguishable . . .a lot of nifty touches, from basic stuff like the ads and the giant inflated cola can to guys kicking the sand in frustration when they just miss a pass and being able to spike a ball into a dude so hard he gets knocked over into the sand . . . There is only one real song in the game and I like it . . .might be my favorite sports game." —Nathan Major (sharkberg.com)

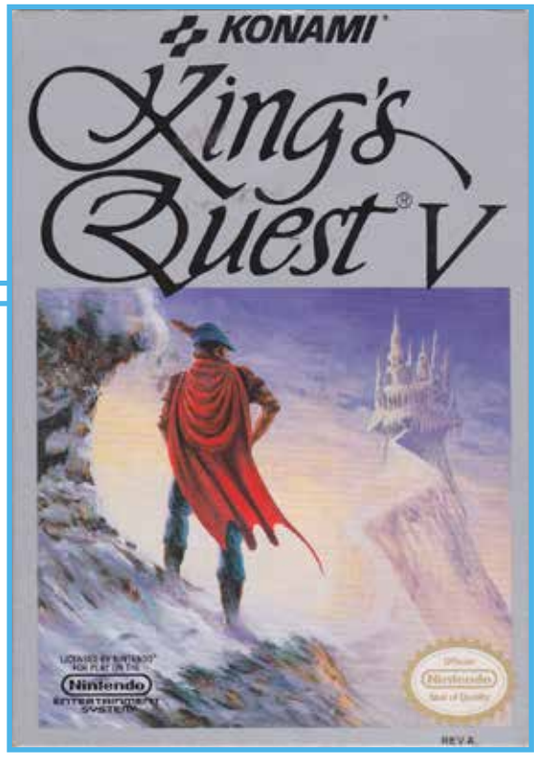




OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

King's Quest V

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Novotrade International
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



King's Quest V was adapted from Sierra On-Line's point-and-click computer game (the CD-ROM version of which boasts digitized voices and hand painted backgrounds). The point-and-click game puts players in the role of King Graham, who must journey through the magical world of Serenia—including mountains, forests, deserts, crystal caves, seas, and an island—to find his missing castle and royal family. Graham travels with a talking owl named Cedric who gives advice and guidance. He also receives help from other animals. You guide Graham with the control pad, but an icon system is used for most functions. Icons you can select from a menu to interact with the environment and characters include walk, quick travel, look, talk, action, item (view last item selected in inventory mode), inventory, and memory. Items to find include keys for opening doors, fish to feed a cat, a sled for riding down a mountain, a tambourine for getting rid of a snake, a stick to throw at a dog, and much more, including weapons for warding off such enemies as a yeti and a dungeon monster.

Notable Quotable:

"The NES version of *King's Quest V* retains the icon-based interface and most of the locations, puzzles, and dialogue from the earlier release. Graphics had to be re-drawn with less colors and detail . . .the artwork in many areas is different. This version removes most alternate solutions to puzzles and does not allow many actions that would render the game unwinnable. It also shortens and eliminates several scenes; for example, it is impossible to revisit the wizard in the first house. A few locations (such as the desert) are smaller. Some death sequences have been removed or modified not to include words related to death." —Moby Games (www.mobygames.com

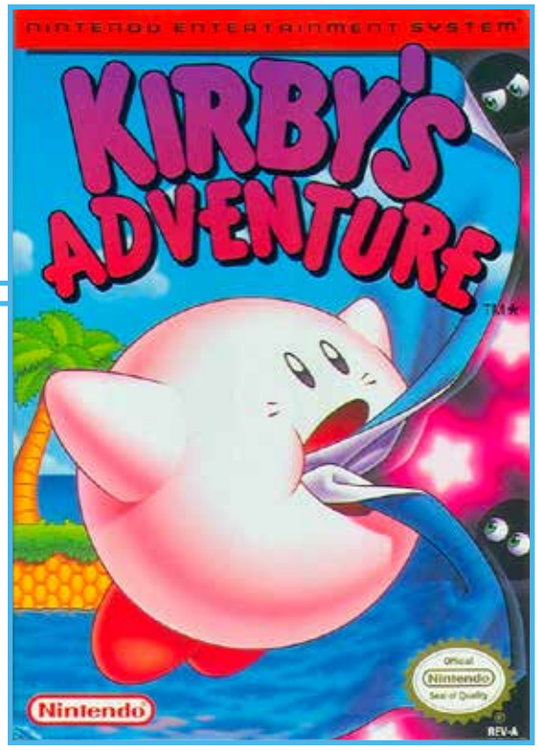
Notable Quotable:

"The majority of the gameplay is comprised of object based puzzles, requiring an item from one place to be used in another for a result that furthers the story (for example, Graham can stop a cat from killing a mouse by hurling an old boot at it, which in turn ensures that the mouse will save Graham later on when he is tied up in a basement) . . . Saving options have mercifully been included, and are indeed necessary, given the sheer number of unexpected deaths and dead ends that the player will encounter . . . The control scheme that replaces the mouse and icon interface is functional, but far more awkward and unwieldy than it should be . . . The graphics are absolutely hideous, replacing once-gorgeous 256-color VGA backdrops with garish splashes of primary colors and ugly graphic tile sets . . .the arrangements and sound quality on the NES port are nothing short of cringeworthy. The original *King's Quest V* is a fantastic game and the NES version, mangled as it is, still manages to retain the heart and spirit of the original." —NintendoComplete.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Kirby's Adventure

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1993



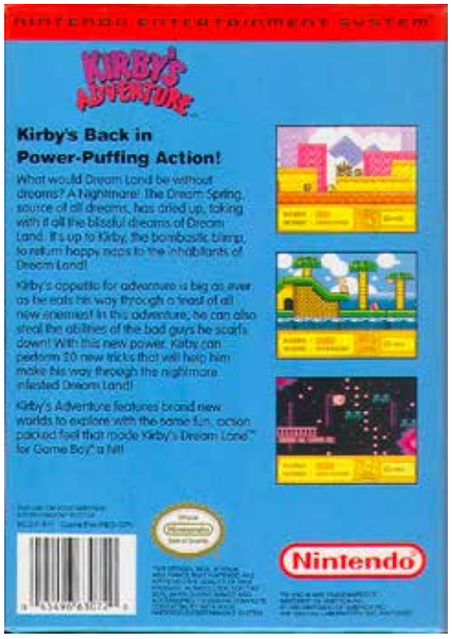
There's trouble in Dream Land, as the Star Rod, which is the source of dreams, has been stolen and broken into seven pieces by the fiendish Dededе. Kirby must step in to help. Produced in the wake of *Kirby's Dream Land* for the Game Boy, *Kirby's Adventure*, which is a cute, colorful, thoroughly enjoyable game, is the second installment in the popular *Kirby* franchise. The iconic pink puffball must run, jump, climb, swim, float (by puffing himself up), and otherwise make his way past enemies and obstacles in seven levels of play: Vegetable Valley, Ice Cream Island, Butter Building, Grape Garden, Yogurt Yard, Orange Ocean, and Rainbow Resort. Kirby can slide into enemies, and the game introduced his trademark ability to swallow enemies and use their powers (such as the ability to shoot beams or fireballs, or wield hammers), or spit the enemies out as projectiles. He can also shoot air pellets when puffed up, shoot water pellets while underwater, and crash into enemies when falling from a high place. Includes three mini-games: Quick Draw Kirby, Egg Catcher, and Crane Fever. At the end of each of the game's seven levels Kirby battles a boss.

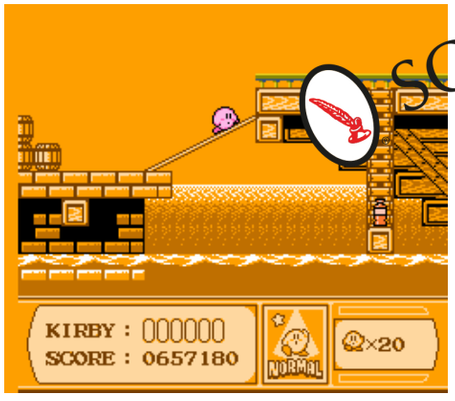
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

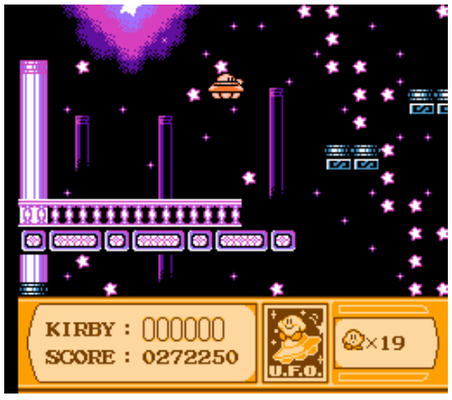
Notable Quotable:
"While the game is lacking in serious challenge, this is more than made up for by the sheer entertainment of the whacked-out bonus levels and voracious enemies. It's worth buying the game just for the bonus levels. 'Intense' seems to be the watchword of more recent video games, but *Kirby* reminds us that sometimes 'pleasant' can be just as entertaining." —*Game Informer* (July 1999)

Notable Quotable:
"An epic, beautifully colorful swan song for the NES . . . Because it came out on the NES after the SNES had already arrived you may have missed out . . .but *Kirby's Adventure* is one that can't be missed. Go back and grab it . . .and experience for yourself the defining console debut for one of the Big N's biggest mascots." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Kirby's Adventure* the 27th best NES game on a list of 100

Notable Quotable:
"Is the NES really dead? Had more game companies taken the time to put together games as fun to play as *Kirby* the system would still be going strong. If there is a member of your family that doesn't require 16-bit graphics then *Kirby* is the game to get. Suitable for family members of all ages, this cute, yet challenging game is the ultimate holiday NES gift. Like a Mario game, *Kirby* is one that you'll come back to again and again." —*1994 Video Game Buyer's Guide*, which named *Kirby's Adventure* the NES "Game of the Year"







Insider Insight: *Kirby's Adventure* was a watershed moment for Nintendo. After the character originally debuted on the Game Boy in *Kirby's Dream Land*, Nintendo upped the ante with a full-size adaptation of HAL Laboratories' creampuff hero. Much more than a colorized adaptation, *Kirby's Adventure* was huge in terms of the game's scope and content. The cart featured mini-games that were more developed game designs than a lot of actual standalone titles on the NES, and we all found out that Kirby was actually bubblegum pink, which only added to his charm. For an 8-bit character sprite Kirby himself absolutely felt alive, with tons of animations and visuals that oozed personality.

The game had as many levels as *Super Mario Bros. 3*, but with more diverse power-ups, bonus content, and way more enemy types. This might be the only game on the NES with more types of enemies than *Metroid*. Kirby even had battery-backed game saves. Everything about the game felt like a technical showcase for the NES hardware's capabilities, as if Nintendo were demonstrating to the world, "Here's everything we know our machine can do, so enjoy!" In the end it was so much more than a tech demo. It was a love letter to all NES fans and a glimpse at the kind of creative direction the company was intending to take in the near future. It's no wonder that the game's development team gave us legendary developers like Satoru Iwata, the eventual CEO of Nintendo.

I remember the TV commercials and print ads, and the way Nintendo showed so much confidence in Kirby as not just a character, but an entirely new intellectual property at large, intentionally marketing Kirby in direct contrast to a lot of the trends in game content at the time ("one tough creampuff" still shoots through my mind every time I hear the name "Kirby").

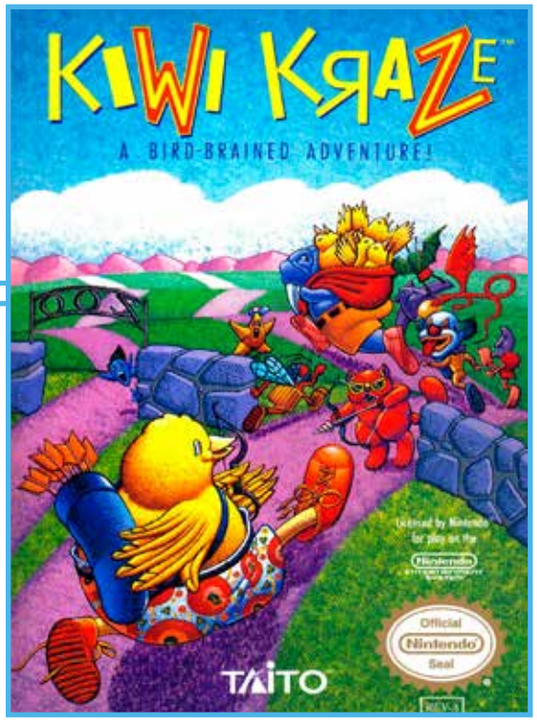
I played the NES version first, despite Kirby originating on the Game Boy. At that time most games in Nintendo's portfolio seemed to be going the other direction, being ported from older NES titles to a Game Boy game. Here was this little floaty circle with beady eyes, slippers, and stumpy arms swimming against the current. There had to be something to it. When I was a kid my best friend got the game for Christmas, and I got in trouble because I snuck over to his house before lunchtime on Christmas Day so he could show me the game. His parents weren't too happy either, but it was worth it.

Kirby had more character than what we were used to seeing in NES games, feeling almost like an actual cartoon character. The game's cutesy visuals, though, completely belied its hardcore platforming mechanics. We played the game to death for years afterward. Kirby became a bigger hero in our eyes than Mario ever was. I would draw Kirby all the time, not just copying him, but actually developing an understanding of the graphic design fundamentals behind the character's stylization; lessons that have stuck with me ever since, even now as a professional game artist more than a quarter of a century later. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Kiwi Kraze

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Software Creations
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1991



Players guide a Kiwi bird named Tiki as he walks, hops, swims, and floats (via various balloon shapes that move at varying speeds) through horizontally and vertically scrolling zoos, caves, mountains, villages, and a pirate ship (all based in New Zealand). His objective is to rescue friends from cages while dodging obstacles (including spikes and fireballs) and shooting arrows at crabs, koalas, angle bats, sea anemones, flying teddy bears, flying robo kitties, flying spearmen, and other enemies. In addition, Kiwi can find such items as laser guns, magic watches (for freezing enemies), and magic staffs (for invincibility).

Directional arrows and a radar map help players navigate their way through the colorful, cartoonish levels, which feature an excellent mix of floating, platforming, and shooting. Despite the cuteness of the action and the inviting nature of the up-tempo music, the shooting is rapid-fire and the game is challenging to beat; enemies are plentiful, levels are timed, bosses fire in spread patterns, and continues are limited. Certain features are missing, such as the animated introductory screen, the UFO vehicle, and the Heaven levels, but this is a fine port of Taito's delightful 1988 arcade game *The New Zealand Story* and a substantive platformer you should spend a lot of time playing.

Notable Quotable:
"While action fans of all ages will enjoy this light-hearted romp through puzzle-like sections of New Zealand, it seems especially geared for younger players." —*Nintendo Power* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A bizarre, endearing platformer . . . Instead of huge, open expanses, the levels actually feel like zoo enclosures . . .a main character who's so adorable even his death scream will leave you squealing for joy. The little quibbles, such as the kiwi's poor jumping skills, are overshadowed by the amount of creativity and sweetness that went into this game." —NES Game Review (nesgamereview.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The simple graphics have been reproduced faithfully and the music is an upbeat remix of the arcade theme. Playability is there in bucket loads, and the game itself is huge. Niggles are few and far between, but one complaint is the appalling sprite flicker when too much is going on . . .the sheer number of things to discover—finding weapons, vehicles, and hidden levels—has you playing into the wee small hours. NES owners have the best platform games of all time in the *Mario* series, but this pretty damn good arcade conversion won't do you any harm at all!" —*Computer and Video Games* (May 1992)

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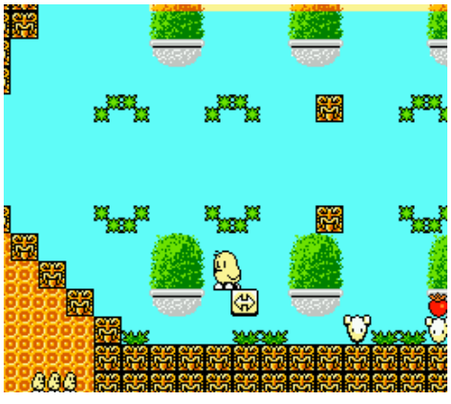
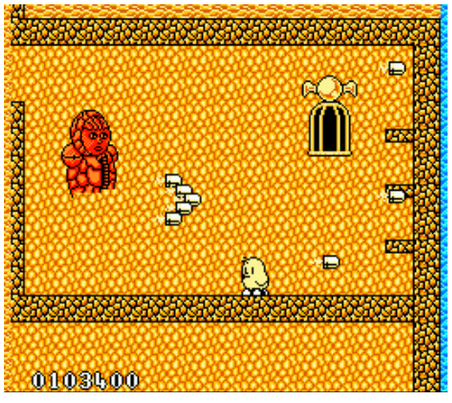
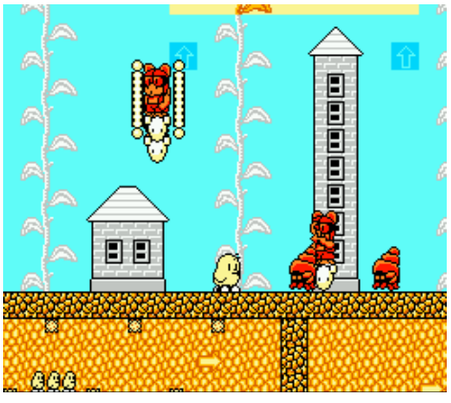
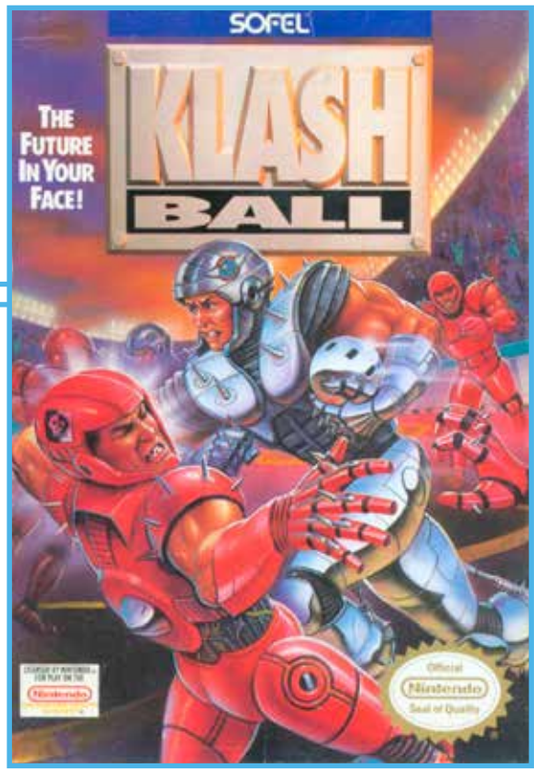






KlashBall

PUBLISHER: Sofel
DEVELOPER: Sofel
GAME TYPE: Sports/Futuristic, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1991



Adapted from the 1988 computer game *Speedball*, *KlashBall* is basically futuristic soccer (the twenty-third century, to be precise) viewed from a top-down perspective. There are four players on either side (plus goalies), and the objective is to kick a small, bouncing ball into the opponent's goal positioned at the top or bottom of the screen. The action scrolls vertically, and the playfield is approximately two screens in size. The sides of the field have openings like the tunnels in *Pac-Man*, and if the ball goes through one it will come out the other side. Unlike traditional soccer, *KlashBall* has bumpers (and other obstacles) and randomly appearing power-ups, letting players freeze the other team, create an extra goalie, protect their team from taking damage, and more. Standard moves include catching the ball and diving to block the ball or knock down an opponent.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

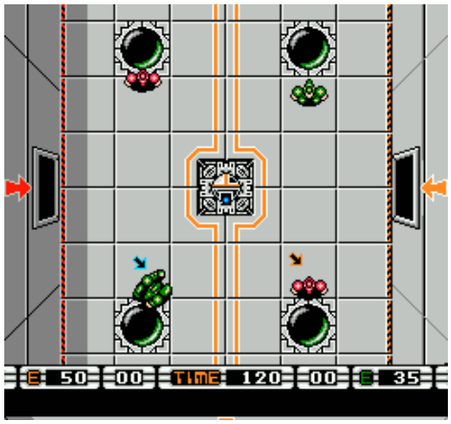
"*KlashBall*'s cool. The graphics are nothing to write home about, but who says a rough and tumble video sports cart needs to look pretty. Jumping, tackling, running, and fast running are what you need, and *KlashBall*'s got 'em." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

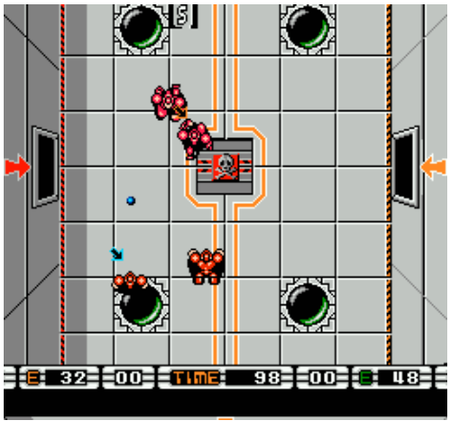
Notable Quotable:

"The graphics aren't that great . . .nice color scheme . . . The characters in the game look like blobs since it's in an overhead view . . . The music is maybe the worst part of this game. The songs just don't fit . . .one of the easiest sports games I've ever played . . . If the playing field was bigger, there were a few more elements, and the game was hard, it would have been better." —Ty Massei (www.world-of-nintendo.com)

Notable Quotable:

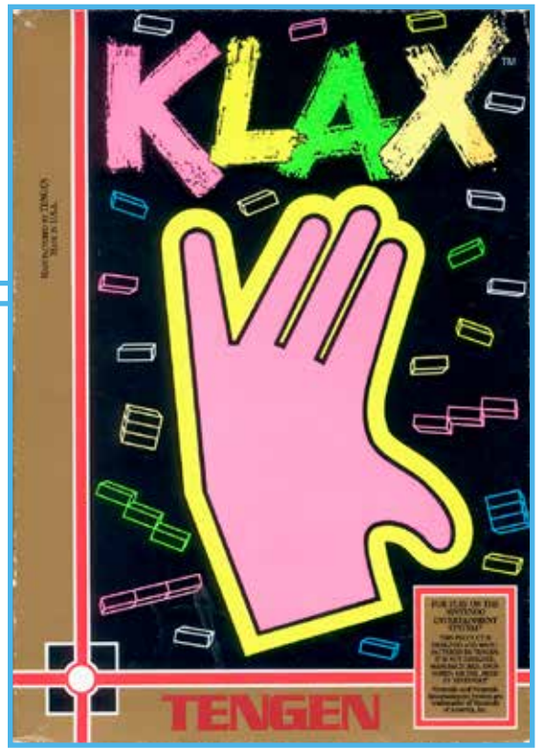
"It's not football, hockey, rugby, or soccer, but it is new and interesting, as it seems to be a combination of all of them. Somewhat difficult to keep track of what is going on at times, but this is due more to the NES than the game . . .air hockey with robots . . .an exciting, fast-moving game that can be difficult to control . . .the computer is very proficient at blowing up your players and scoring." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1991)





Klax

PUBLISHER: Tengen
DEVELOPER: Tengen
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



In *Klax*, you must line up descending colored tiles in rows, columns, or diagonals. Effectively scoring a "Klax," which removes the corresponding tiles from the screen, requires tiles come toward the paddle you control via a conveyor belt made up of five vertical rows. When you catch a tile you can hold onto it, push it back up onto the conveyor belt, or go ahead and push it into position in a bin that is beneath your paddle. Your paddle can hold up to five tiles at a time. In each level of the game you are given a specific task. For example, some levels ask you to catch a certain number of tiles before you can move on to the next stage, while others ask you to get a certain number of diagonal Klaxes. Elaborate patterns, such as X's, can boost your score, but they can be a little tricky to create. If you let a tile get past you without catching it first it counts against your drop meter. Let too many tiles get past you and the game is over. Atari's original coin-op classic (1989) has better voice effects and crisper, more richly colored graphics, but the NES version does offer a *Pong*-type bonus game called Blob Ball, where you try to protect a bouncing blob from a wall of spikes. Also the two-player split screen mode remains intact. An excellent entry in the "falling block" subgenre pioneered by *Tetris*, *Klax* is easily one of the better unlicensed games for the console.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"A simple game that can be learned just by watching someone play for a few minutes . . . From round to round *Klax* offers more variety than *Tetris*. But the gradually increasing difficulty is not as finely tuned, and *Klax* also lacks some of *Tetris*'s charm . . . Nevertheless *Klax* is one of those engrossing games that makes hours pass by like minutes. It definitely deserves a look." —*Game Players* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:

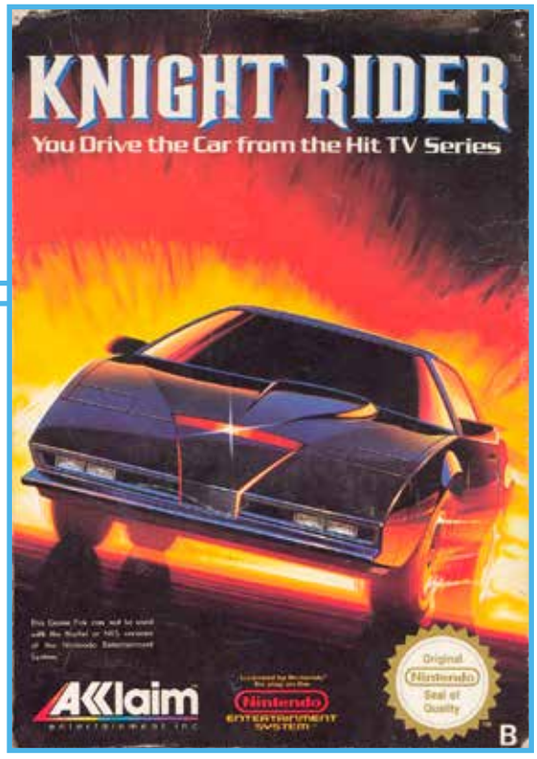
"The graphics aren't the greatest, but are still good enough for a puzzle game. This game uses several different backgrounds to give some variety to each wave, and most of them look decent . . . The colored tiles are nice and have decent animation . . .some of the zany sound effects from the arcade original made it over to the NES . . . You still get the 'Oooh!' and 'Yeah!' sounds when you make matches of four or five titles, which are slightly muffled but still audible, as well as the funny 'Wauugh!' when a tile goes over. There are some glaring submissions, such as the 'Awwww' when you lose . . . The music is off by default, and you just may want to leave it that way . . . The game is very responsive, which helps you pull off some quick moves . . .another great puzzler for the NES, as well as another quality arcade conversion from Tengen." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net)

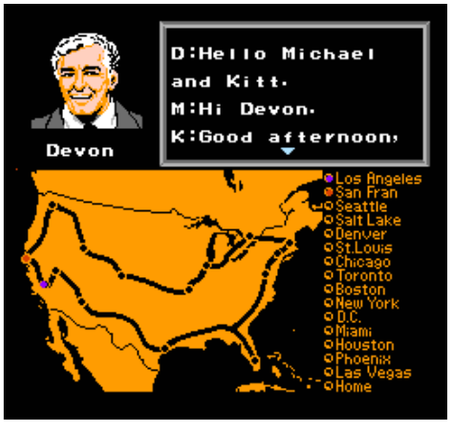
Insider Insight: I remember the first time I heard about *Klax*, a game that was being promoted as Atari's arcade follow-up to *Tetris*. I loved *Tetris*—hell, I was a huge fan of puzzle games in general—so I already knew this was going to be right up my alley. After playing *Klax* I eagerly waited for the home versions to arrive. As great as *Klax* was, I knew it was a game best suited to home systems, and I suppose that is backed up by the large number of formats it's appeared on. In fact, at one point *Klax* was the most officially converted arcade game, with no less than 25 different ports!

I have to confess that the first time I played it in the home was on my humble ZX Spectrum computer, not the NES, but from there I ended up buying it for pretty much every system I ever owned. Looking at the huge collection in my garage, it's much harder to pick out a system that I don't have *Klax* for than one that I do. Among them somewhere is of course the NES cartridge, and a great version of the game it is. You could argue it's not a particularly hard game to port, but you'd be surprised how many systems get it wrong (BBC Micro and Game Boy, I'm looking at you). Just fire it up, drop those colored tiles into the bin like you're told, and pretend it's the '90s all over again! —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

Knight Rider

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Pack-In-Video
GAME TYPE: Demolition/ Combat Racing, 1 player
YEAR: 1989





Based on the semi-classic television show (1982–1986) starring David Hasselhoff, *Knight Rider* puts you behind the wheel of the trademark black 1982 Pontiac Trans-Am KITT (short for Knight Industries Two Thousand). Gameplay consists of driving down twisting, turning streets while firing bullets, missiles, and lasers at certain vehicles (including bosses) while avoiding or collecting items (such as gasoline and shield repairs) from others. Each of the 15 missions, which are viewed from the cockpit of the car, is similar in nature, but the backgrounds do reflect the various destination cities, and some roads are icy. KITT can jump over enemy fire, but unfortunately he can't spout wisecracks like he did in the TV series. The top half of the screen shows the racing action while the bottom displays the car's instrument panel, including the timer, score counter, voice gauge (for emergency warnings), shield indicator, gas gauge, tachometer, speedometer, radar (warns about oncoming curves, shows your relationship to other cars ahead), distance meter (to the next city), and weapon indicator. Timed stages, along with fuel depletion, lend a sense of urgency to the game, which gets difficult in later levels. As TV-based games go this one isn't half bad. It's a straightforward combat race that doesn't fully exploit its license, but it gets the job done.

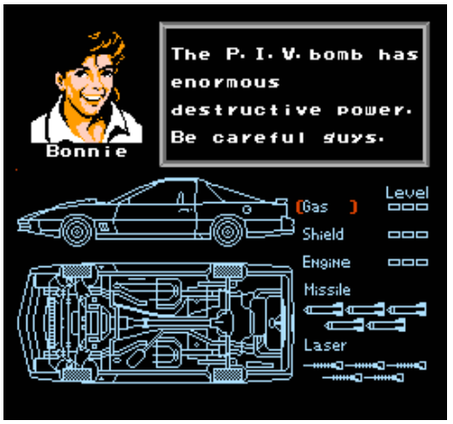
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

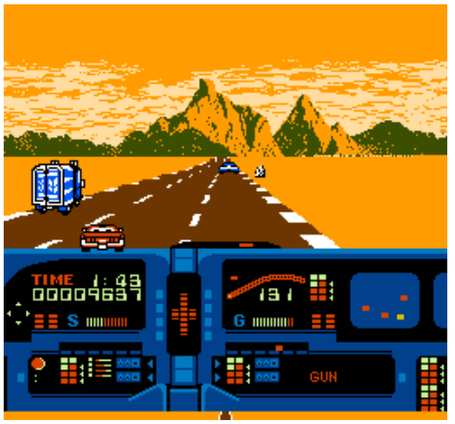
Notable Quotable:

"Unlike the TV show, where Michael Knight and KITT must solve mysteries and save the girl, this game offers straight up arcade action . . . Even though it's highly repetitive, destroying things at high speeds is just fun . . . It's not the kind of game you'll feel obliged to complete, but you'll gladly slap the cartridge into your machine when you just want to tear up some asphalt and run some people off the road." —Joshua Hoffman (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

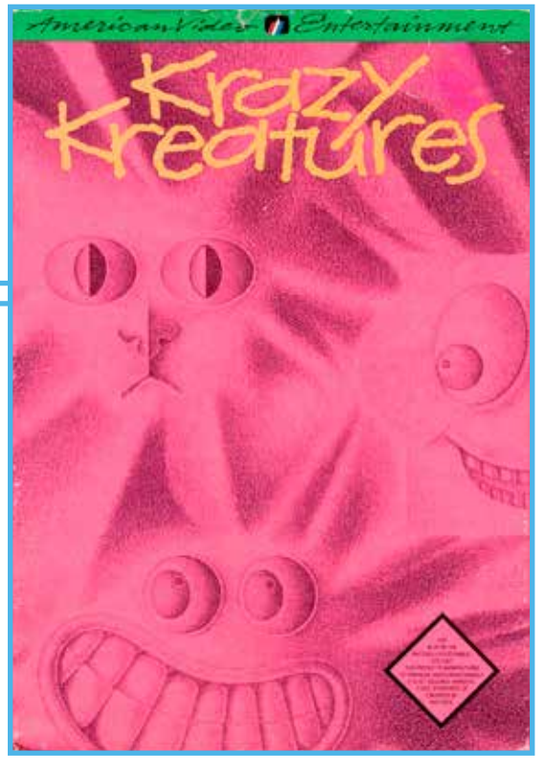
"Gives you a sense of urgency and keeps you under stress at all times thanks to the time limit and fuel limitations . . .visuals were pretty good for the NES . . . If you're going too fast around corners you'll hear yourself skid as you slide out of control and when you brake. Unfortunately, explosions are really quiet and lack any real punch; the same goes for gunshots. You'll get music during gameplay and at the title screen, but it's all a far cry from the ultra-cool *Knight Rider* theme song from the show." —Brad Hicks (www.swankworld.com)





Krazy Kreatures

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Bitmasters
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990



In *Krazy Kreatures*, waves of small animals and other objects jump from off screen onto a rectangular or otherwise geometric playfield with a plain background, and it is up to the player to place the objects in vertical, horizontal, and diagonal rows of three or more identical objects to remove them. Gamers use a cursor to pick up the objects (one at a time) and place them in the desired spot on the board. The longer the row of objects removed (11 is the maximum) the more points players will score. Objects, or puzzle pieces if you will, include cats, dogs, elephants, snails, cobras, chatter teeth, spheres, books, atomic clocks, Martians, and more. From time to time a question mark will appear that destroys surrounding objects, but that's about it in terms of power-ups or special items. You can play solo, but it's more fun to have a friend join in for cooperative or competitive action. There's no in-game music, the creatures and other items are simply colored and lacking in detail, and some gamers will find the action repetitious; however, for those of us who enjoy a good, simple puzzle game, the timed, fast-paced action can become quite addicting. Just ignore the primitive graphics and sound effects and have yourself a good time. Unlicensed and hard to find.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

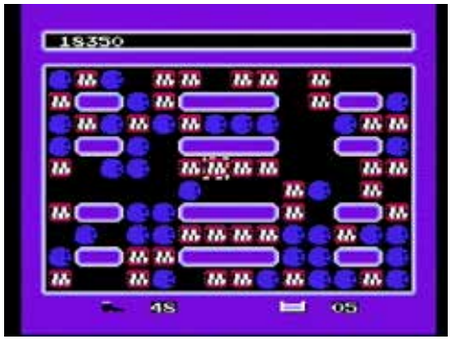
"*Krazy Kreatures* is a fun diversion that quickly turns into a maddening exercise in survival. By the time you reach the tenth level your sweaty fingers will be slipping off your control pad. This cart takes more fast movement than actual strategy." —*GamePro* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"It's a shame that most people judge a game straight away on graphics and would dismiss it out of hand, because that's what I did the first time I saw this ugly game . . .fast and addictive gameplay . . . Tension really starts to build as you hear the clock ticking down and you've only got a few tiles left to clear onscreen . . . If the game suffers from anything, it's the fact that it's just a little too simple. There is no deviation from the basic formula . . . Occasionally a '?' icon appears that will destroy all the tiles around it; that's about it. There is definitely room for more power-ups here." —Ultimate Console Database (ultimateconsoledatabase.com)

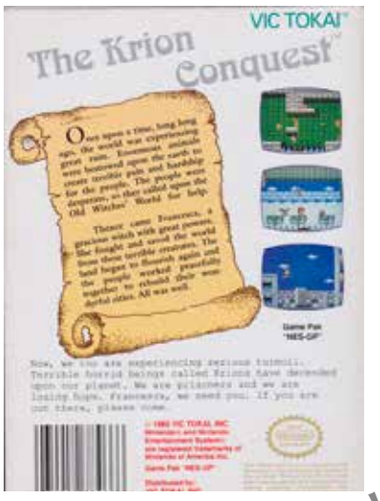
Notable Quotable:

"[We] were playing cooperatively [but] it was impossible to come up with a strategy to work together . . .several times we got our cursors confused with each other or would move a piece out of a line the other was working on." —Hoz's 8-bit NES Quest (hoz14nes.wordpress.com)



The Krion Conquest

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai
DEVELOPER: Vic Tokai
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Set in the "futuristic" world of 1999 (seems like the storywriter for the game could have pushed it a little farther into the future), *The Krion Conquest* finds the Krion Empire robot battalion attacking Earth. Enter Francesca, whom you guide through the game's five levels of play: Underground Base, Ice Base, Underwater Base (Oxygen is a factor here), Sky Base, and Space Station, each with three stages. The game plays a lot like *Mega Man*, but Francesca can shoot upward (in addition to left and right), duck, and ride on a broom. To battle the various crawling, bouncing, and flying robots you'll encounter you can use six types of magic selectable from a menu screen right from the start: normal shots, freeze shots, fire (Francesca changes to Fire-Bird and wipes out all onscreen enemies), ball (shots ricochet off walls), shield (forms barrier against enemies), and the aforementioned broom. Holding down the shooting button charges up the magic gauge for unleashing super shots. There are also bosses to battle, including such baddies as Thunder Knight, Aqua Knight, and Sky Hawk.

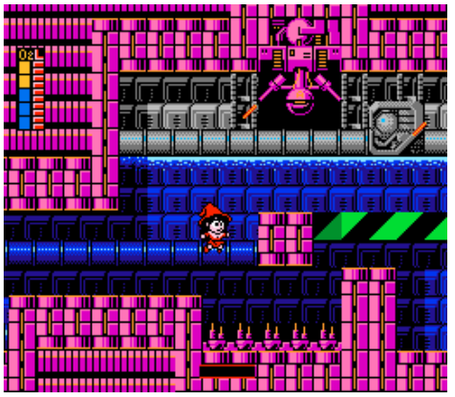
SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics and screens in *The Krion Conquest* resemble those in the *Mega Man* series, but don't be fooled by small similarities. When it comes to action, adventure, and graphics, *The Krion Conquest* is unfortunately a step behind those trend-setting games." —*Game Players* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The action is incredibly tough, with respawning enemies and parts that rely on memorization rather than skill. Cheap hits are a common occurrence and health pickups are scarce; your health doesn't even regenerate when you finish an act, and if you die during a boss you're sent back to the start of the third act! This leads to frustration, especially later in the game when you're forced to replay brutal sections. To make things worse you only have three lives and no continues to beat the entire game!" – Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

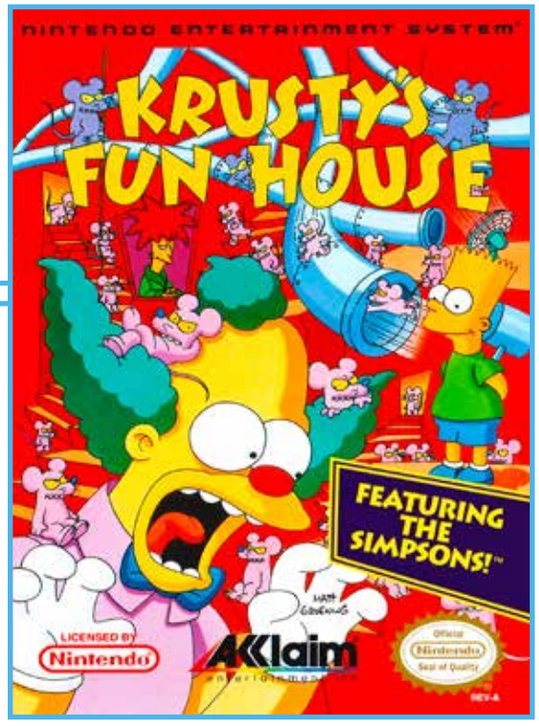
Notable Quotable:
"Many of the robot enemy designs are bland and forgettable knockoffs of Wily baddies, outside of the huge final boss. The music is rather repetitive, with a severe lack of bass in many tracks . . . Each boss takes way too many hits to destroy . . . The weapons aren't balanced or used as properly as they should . . . It's a mess of decent ideas taken from better games. Much of the content was stripped away when the game was brought overseas. All of the cutscenes and story elements were removed aside from the intro . . . A sequel was planned for the SNES but the company couldn't afford the dev kits." —Neil Foster (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Notable Quotable:
"A young witch takes on an evil empire in this adventure . . . The look and feel are reminiscent of the *Mega Man* series." —*Nintendo Power* (February 1991)



Krusty's Fun House

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Audiogenic Software
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player
YEAR: 1992



Krusty's Fun House is patterned after the computer game *Rat-Trap* but with characters from *The Simpsons*. The house of the title, which consists of five sections of 14 levels each, is being overrun with rats that walk on floors and turn around when they hit a wall or other obstacle. Players must help the cantankerous clown lure the lemming-like creatures into traps operated by Bart, Homer, Sideshow Mel, and Corporal Punishment. This involves creating stair steps by moving blocks (rats can't climb anything that is more than one block high), finding secret passageways, leading rats into pipes and onto bounce blocks to help them reach certain areas, covering holes so rats can cross them, setting off fireworks, picking up pipes and connecting them to other pipes to create pathways, placing fans in strategic areas to blow rats up, right, and left, and wrecking floors and walls—anything to get the rats to move to their deadly destination. To ward off the aliens, birds, snakes, and flying pigs that get in Krusty's way he can throw pies and rubber balls at them. Krusty does lots of platforming, but the action is more about leading rats to their death than anything else, so you must think your way through each level. The game has cute, cartoon-like graphics, and the action will appeal to strategy and puzzle fans, but those looking for a standard platformer should look elsewhere.

OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Cool graphics give a puzzle atmosphere to the Fun House and capture that Simpsons feeling. The grating tunes, on the other hand, are a real bummer . . .a great puzzle game for first timers, or for those who don't want straight up puzzle fare. However, puzzle fanatics beware—this cart isn't gonna do it for ya." —*GamePro* (September 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Krusty moves very smoothly, which is a major improvement over the other *Simpsons* games . . .the visuals are very well done and convey the quirkiness of the show. My only gripe is that it can be difficult to see what blocks you can pick up . . .isn't a horrible game, but it is not my cup of tea. If you like puzzle games and *The Simpsons* definitely give this one a go. – Reaper's Review (YouTube)

Insider Insight: I've done a lot of research on childhood trauma, aggression, and hope. How could I, as an educator, teach resiliency and help students overcome obstacles in their lives? This game is an appropriate analogy for this ideological journey. WTF, Nintendo? Did you actually set out to frustrate your customers to the point they would throw the controller through their TV? Krusty is somehow able to jump THROUGH things in the game instead of landing on them, and sometimes the rats glitch and walk through, too. SERIOUSLY?! Did you gain some sick pleasure from knowing that if players managed to reach the end of this unreasonably difficult game they would be rewarded with the immediate feeling that they had just wasted hours of their lives to walk. through. a. door? COME ON. Games like this crush hope, but they also elevate us through experiential wisdom. They teach us that sometimes the emotional energy we invest in fighting battles isn't worth it and we need to learn when to walk away. Resiliency is not always replaying level after level in hope of finally moving forward, or determination of fighting all the way to the end. Sometimes resiliency is realizing you can give up this painful game and warn others. This house isn't fun. It's a house of hurt. In time and with support we can learn to forgive, but we will never forget. – Krystle Tiedeman, librarian, producer of *The King of Arcades*

Kung Fu

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1985

A nice port of Irem's *Kung-Fu Master* arcade game (1984), *Kung Fu* has less-detailed graphics than its coin-op counterpart, but it handles better and has faithfully ported (if repetitious) music. Players guide a kung fu expert named Thomas as he runs, jumps, punches, kicks (including jump kicks), and crouches his way through a barrage of knife throwers, grippers (who hug players and deplete their health), fire-breathing dragons, poisonous moths, and other enemies. Enemies steadily attack from the left and right. On a mission to save his girlfriend Sylvia, Thomas will also fend off confetti balls and other items that drop from the ceiling, and he'll engage in boss battles with such characters as Boomerang Fighter, Black Magician (who can grow back parts of his body), Stick Fighter (wields a whirling stick), Giant (slow but powerful, with a hard punch), and the Gang Leader, Mr. X (a master of all martial arts). The simple beat-'em-up action is dated (not to mention brief) but fun, and the game is a system launch title that holds a special place in the hearts of many early NES owners.

Notable Quotable:

"Nintendo has done a great job on this coin-op conversion, which is loaded with action, speed, and challenge . . .a very lively contest with precise controls and great playability . . .the graphics in the Nintendo version are better than the visuals on either the Apple II or Commodore versions from Data East . . . Anyone who loves a good, action-packed challenge will get many hours of fun from this game." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"A skilled gamer can get through *Kung Fu* in its entirety in less than 10 minutes. What makes the game so special, then? Apart from its fun gameplay and difficult boss battles, *Kung Fu* had inherent replay value simply because the game started over once you beat it with a higher difficulty level. This made it a prime game for high-score hunting, with certain parts of the experience that were of the make and break variety. Could you get past the bee-throwing enemy on stage four without losing a life? It was integral if you wanted a high score. And who could forget Mr. X's maniacal laughter each time he defeated Thomas, keeping his kidnapped girlfriend for his own." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Kung Fu* the 62nd best NES game

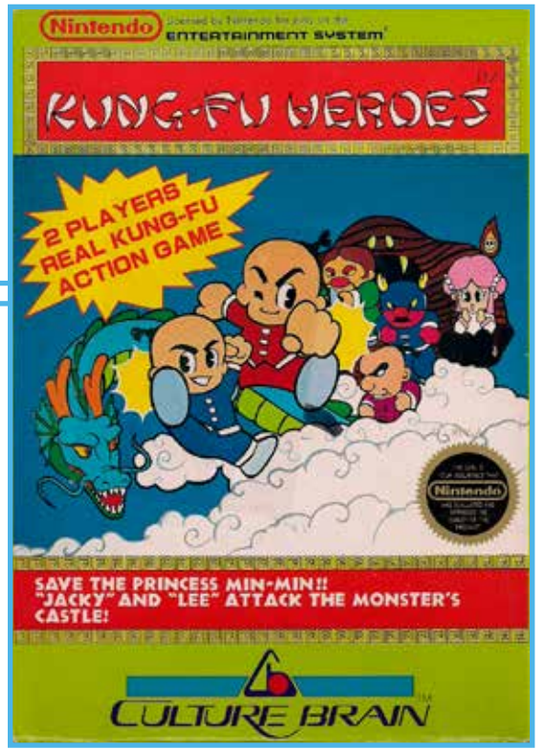
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: My parents got divorced when I was 13 and it was quite a shock, because it was totally unexpected. In hindsight, though, I probably should have seen the signs, as my mum went to live with someone else and my dad, whom we (my younger brother, older sister, and me) stayed with, began officially dating a new woman almost straight after. This new woman lived far from us, but she had a big house and several children of her own, so when my dad went to see her for the weekend we would stay over, too. This was great, as not only did they have lots of games we didn't have, but we would get to go to the local social club that had a PlayChoice-10 machine, along with a pool table and lots of other fun things in the back room.

Many of the games available on the PlayChoice weren't that exciting, as it only contained the initial wave of Black Box NES titles, including *Urban Champion*, *Baseball*, and *Wrecking Crew*. But one game that we instantly knew and loved was *Kung Fu*, which of course was a port of the excellent Irem coin-op *Kung-Fu Master*. Another reason why this title got so much play compared to the others was that I had previously purchased the ZX Spectrum port of the game, which was absolutely terrible. And the awful taste that left in my mouth was quickly removed by playing the almost arcade-perfect NES iteration. Plus I couldn't get enough of beat-'em-ups back then, so between this game and *Excitebike*, the spare change my dad would give me went pretty quickly. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years

Kung-Fu Heroes

PUBLISHER: Culture Brain
DEVELOPER: Culture Brain
GAME TYPE: Maze/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



The title of *Kung-Fu Heroes* makes it sound like a side-scrolling beat-'em-up, but the game is actually a top-down, fixed-screen maze fighter based on Taiyo's *Chi[illegible]ero*, a highly original arcade game from 1984. A pair of cartoonish martial arts masters named Jacky and Lee battle their way through eight castles, each of which contains four rooms (screens). Said castles include Spearman's Castle, Gunman's Castle, Buffalo's Castle, Demon Cat's Castle, Demon's Castle, Castle of Tricks, Dragon's Castle, and The Last Castle. They move up, down, right, and left, and use kung-fu punches and flying "moon assault" kicks to battle an assortment of oddly comical enemies, including Kung Fu Command, Spearman, Gunman, Bison Commando, Mr. Coffin, Cat Mage, Medusa Cat, and Dragon Man. By destroying blocks and stones players reveal swords, candles (for seeing hidden traps), invincibility, projectile attacks, and other helpful items and power-ups. Defeating all the enemies on a screen opens a door to the next area. Underground bonus stages are included as well. Simple, cute, fun, and charmingly retro (some will call it repetitious), the game is enjoyable when played solo, but it truly shines when another gamer joins in to team up against the enemies. See also: *Little Ninja Brothers*.

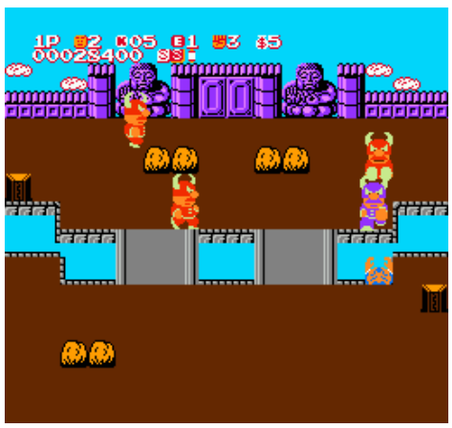
OSCHITER PUBLISHING

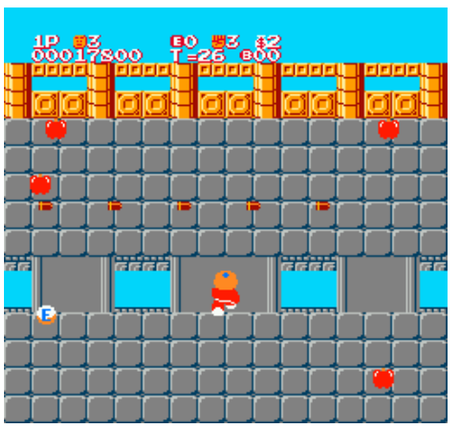
Notable Quotable:

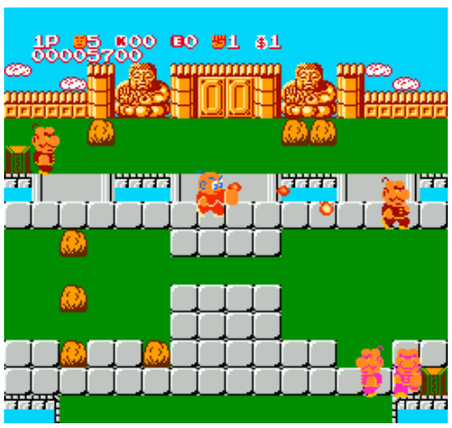
"There is not a lot of finesse or grace in the martial arts moves of the heroes, Jackie and Lee, which may be at least partly due to their very small size . . . The overall graphic treatment is cartoon-like and mildly humorous, with a sameness to the levels that soon becomes boring. There seems to be some sort of bug in the programming that makes parts of the characters disappear under portions of the scenery under certain conditions. We could deal with the unimaginative graphics if the gameplay were strong, but we soon became tired of playing the game because the action is so similar from screen to screen." — *Computer Entertainer* (April 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Charming looking . . .well-animated characters . . . The move set in *Kung-Fu Heroes* provides a sense of strategy . . .appropriate martial arts music and sounds fitting the cute kung fu theme . . . As a single player experience *Kung-Fu Heroes* isn't all that alluring. As a two-player game, however, this entry in the martial arts genre gives players the opportunity to devise plenty of team-based tactics with a combination of power-ups, items, and move sets, ultimately saving the day. It's this simple formula which is sure to unite family and friends, and before you know it everybody will be—kung fu fighting." —Liam Doolan (www.nintendolife.com) reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii







Laser Invasion

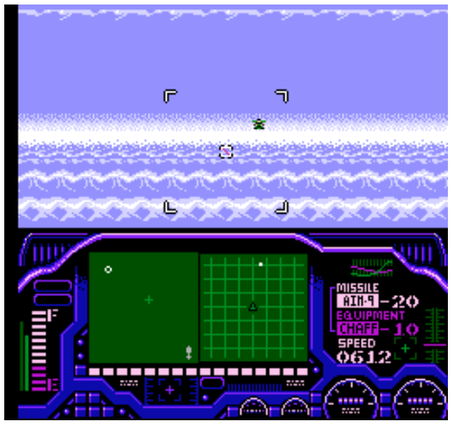
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1991

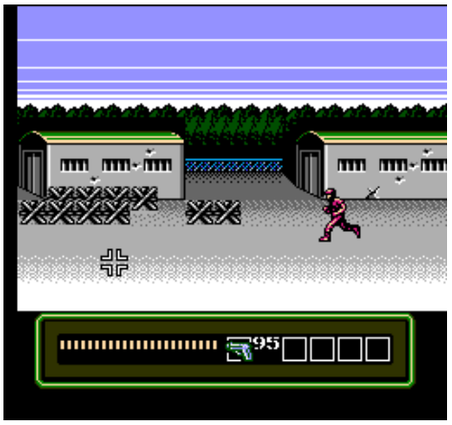
This multi-genre game puts you in the cockpit of a helijet, guiding a cannon sight around the view screen (which takes up the top half of the playfield) and shooting missiles at enemy fighters, aerial mines, and ground enemies in the employ of Sheik Toxic Moron. Below the viewscreen is the control panel, where you monitor radar, remaining missiles, remaining optional equipment (fuel tanks, ground bombs, and chaff-activated protection systems), air speed indicator, and damage meter. After destroying the Sheik's Vulture Squadron, you must land the helijet and engage in action that scrolls to the right, where you fire at enemies that run, jump out of windows, parachute, and otherwise appear on the screen. Then you will enter the 3-D Confusion Maze which, like the rest of the areas in the game, is viewed from a first-person perspective. Here you'll go through buildings and trenches as you fire at enemies that appear in the distance. The game is designed for use with Konami's Laser Scope headset, which is a voice activated optical targeting device, but it's easier to control using the standard control pad and Zapper gun. It doesn't rank among Konami's greatest titles, but it exhibits their typical quality in terms of both graphics and sounds. There are only four levels, but the game has three distinct types of play and is riddled with enemies, making it a challenge (and somewhat frustrating) to try and beat.

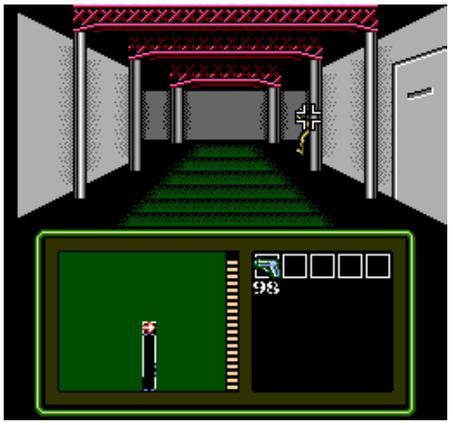
Memories: The helijet section of *Laser Invasion* evokes Konami's *Top Gun*, but your craft is easier to land. The middle stage will remind players of *Operation Wolf*, while the third stage is somewhat similar to *Wolfenstein 3D*. Like R.O.B. and the Power Glove, Konami's Laser Scope is a cool collectible, but pretty worthless as a controller. The Famicom version of the game has password saves, a feature the US version sadly lacks.

Notable Quotable:
"The action is steady, with lots of enemies attacking at all times. A decent game whether you have the Scope or not." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"*Laser Invasion* was made by Konami, and it shows. The quality is there. Enjoy the game or not, the graphics and gameplay are sharp . . . There's a fair variety in this game and it presents a decent challenge. Definitely underrated." —The NES Files (www.nesfiles.com)







SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Last Action Hero

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft
DEVELOPER: Bits Studios
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

LAST ACTION HERO
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LICENSED BY NINTENDO
PRESS START TO PLAY

Featuring between-level cutscenes to tell the story, *Last Action Hero* is adapted from the 1993 comedy/adventure film. The game puts players in the Arnold Schwarzenegger role of Jack Slater, who must walk (left/right only), crouch, punch, kick, and jump his way through seven levels, each inspired by a scene from the movie: Christmas in L.A., A Medieval Nightmare, A Date with Your Ex, The Car Chase, Leo's Funeral, Premiere Night, and Finale. Enemies to battle include knights, archers, bad cops, guerilla guards, psycho candy girls, the Ripper, and others who have broken out of the movie screen and entered the "real" world to unleash cheap hits on our hero. Health hearts are the only pick-up. The limited, strategy deprived, punch-and-kick action is broken up somewhat by Jack having to ride elevators and jump on cars and trucks.

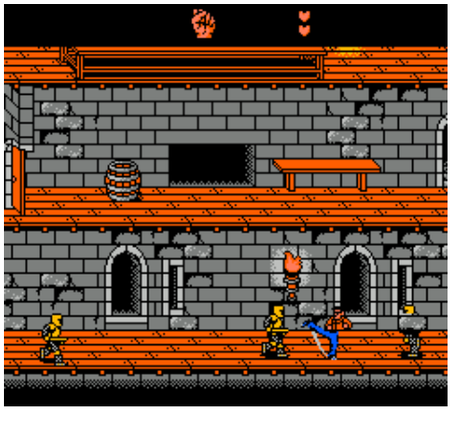
Memories: *Kindergarten Cop* and *Last Action Hero* were quite the change of pace from Schwarzenegger's earlier films, and not in a good way. Sure, they were kind of fun, and Arnold is a likeable enough presence on screen when he's going for laughs, but the movies were a far cry from such awesome action films as *Conan the Barbarian*, *The Terminator*, and *Predator*.

Notable Quotable:

"The NES game departs from the movie right around the second level, when the boy dreams of a medieval setting involving a Robin Hood-like environment in which the player must then traverse. This seems like a tacky random add-on . . . Attacking range is short and hit detection is terrible . . .looks really good . . .bright detail . . .creatively drawn . . .the enemies get repetitive." —Eric Bailey (obsoletegamer.com)

Notable Quotable:

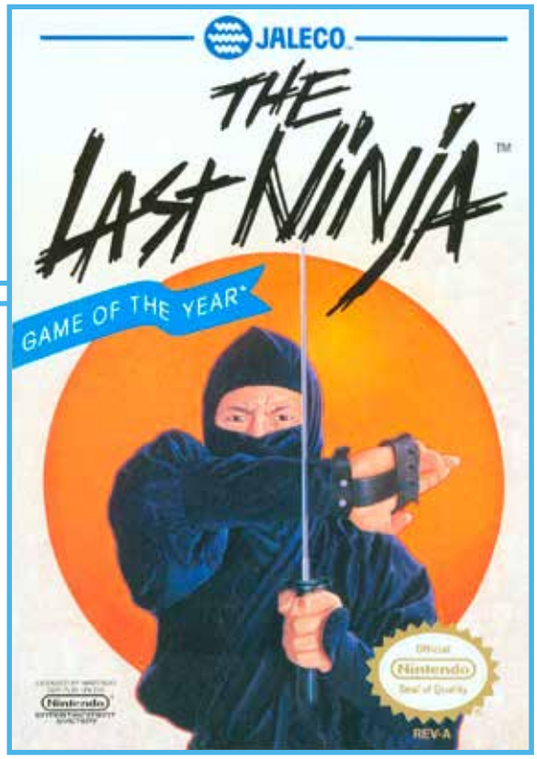
"Completely different than the 16-bit counterparts and is more of a conventional 8-bit platform game with smaller arcade style levels. But that doesn't make it any better than the other versions—in fact, this might just be the WORST of all the *Last Action Hero* games . . . The controls and graphics are a complete mess for the most part, with thick white stripes representing rain and enemies coming at you from all angles, beating you to a pulp within an instant. Arnie's repertoire of moves remains the same kick and punch as in the other games, only in the NES version the kick is the only usable attack since the punch barely even reaches in front of your own nose. Bad guys are shooting you from the background, including from the trash cans, and there's nothing you can do." —Audun Sorlie (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



OSCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Last Ninja

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
DEVELOPER: Beam Software
GAME TYPE: Adventure, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



In *The Last Ninja* you control Armakuni, Master Ninja of ninth-century feudal Japan, who gets transported to modern Manhattan. On a mission to bring down the Shogun Kunitoki, Armakuni must battle his way through six puzzle- and enemy-filled areas, each viewed from an isometric perspective. These include Central Park, The Street, The Sewers, The Office, The Mansion, and Final Battle. Armakuni can punch, kick, and jump, and he can use throwing stars, a sword, and other weaponry, but the key to success in this game is finding various objects (keys, bottles, staffs, credit cards, and the like) and discovering how to use them to get past such obstacles as locked doors, hidden entrances, alligators, and panthers. *The Last Ninja* is a port of *The Last Ninja 2: Back with a Vengeance* (Commodore 64) but with some differences, including altered layouts, simplified combat and graphics, and various sanitized elements (the enemy jugglers throw pins instead of knives, for example).

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"The puzzles are rarely difficult to figure out, providing Armakuni has the requisite item, but the controls make things trickier than they should be . . .it is nigh impossible to line Armakuni up perfectly with his assailant like the game requires for a hit to register. While some weapons, namely the katana and the nunchakus, are more forgiving due to their extended range, most encounters require the player to flee if there is to be any hope of reaching the next stage intact. In the sewer stage there are doors that, if entered, kill Armakuni outright with absolutely no warning . . . The main character's sprite is very smoothly animated, making jumps and attacks a joy to behold. The enemies are all well-detailed, and though they lack variety, fit in well with their environments . . .the excellent music from the original is gone, replaced with bizarre beeps, awkward pitch bends, and muffled samples of thwack and thunk sound effects . . . Though the adaptation is poor, the magic of the original game can still be glimpsed here on the rare occasions when everything functions as it should." —NintendoComplete.com

The Last Starfighter

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Graftgold
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1990

MINDSCAPE PRESENTS
THE LAST STARFIGHTER
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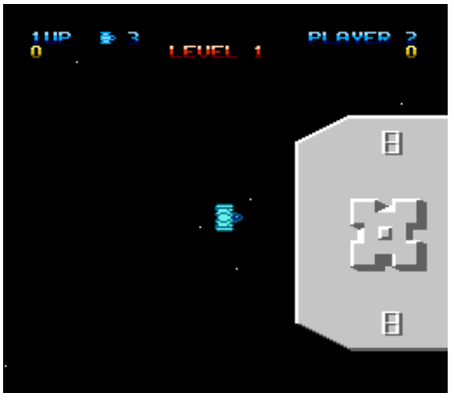
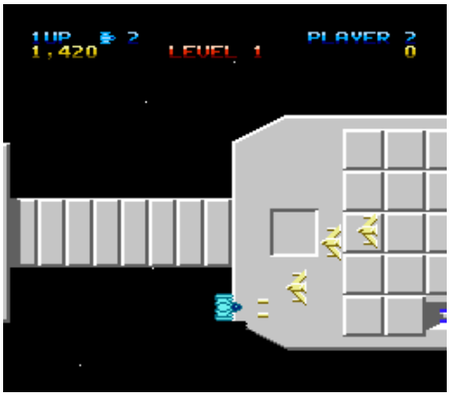
With *The Last Starfighter*, Mindscape took the Commodore 64 classic *Uridium* (1986), slapped on a *The Last Starfighter* title screen from the 1984 feature film, and [illegible] the soundtrack accordingly. Viewed from a top-down perspective, the game has players piloting a GunStar fighter ship over a series of what look like metallic outer space aircraft carriers, firing lasers at swirling formations of enemy ships and at surface-based targets. Unfortunately, flat visuals make it all too easy to misjudge and run into said targets. Be careful to avoid running into communications aerials, meteor shields, and other obstructions. You should also avoid enemy bullets and homing mines, the latter of which lock onto your flight pattern after you fly over flashing generator ports. As in *Defender*, your ship can instantly turn around and shoot in the other direction. It can also accelerate, decelerate, turn sideways, move up and down, and do half-rolls, but it always remains aligned in the middle of the screen.

Memories: I'm a big fan of *The Last Starfighter*, starring Lance Guest as arcade jockey Alex Rogan. I realize the plot is just a *Star Wars* rip-off, but it's a lot of fun, the old-school special effects are cool (they really pop in high-def), and I absolutely love Catherine Mary Stewart, who was also great in *Night of the Comet* (1984), where she kicks butt at *Tempest*. It's a shame the NES game is just a reskinned shooter that really has nothing to do with the movie beyond the branding, the music, the cover art, and the abbreviated names of characters on the high score list.

Notable Quotable:
"Short-sighted design choice of only half a screen to react to oncoming threats . . .endlessly looping background music . . .harder-than-*Silver Surfer* difficulty . . .bizarrely uninspired choice of movie license . . .not fun." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

Notable Quotable:
"This might be the worst shooter I've ever played . . .your ship can't move properly . . .the developers are constantly putting you in harm's way . . .in level 1 you're flying over a large ship in the background, colored completely white, and containing turrets. What color are the projectiles the turrets shoot at you? Why, white, of course! Better still, you can crash into barriers on the ship, even though the barriers appear just like any other structure on the ship that you can destroy or fly through." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

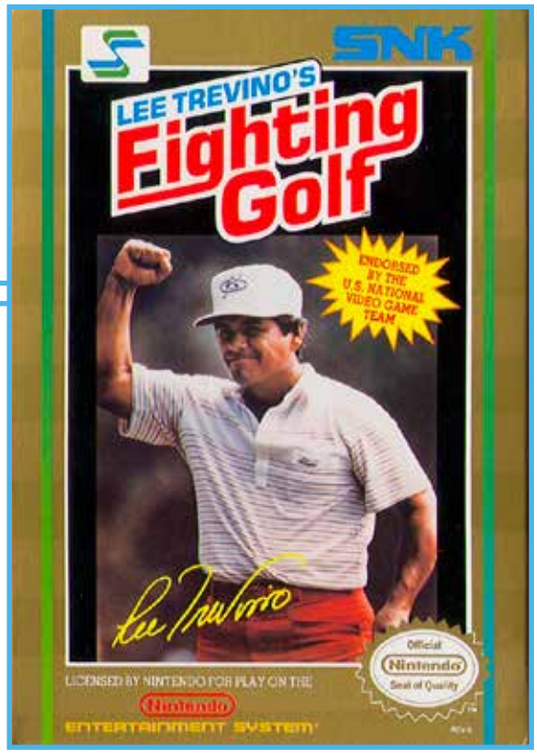




OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Lee Trevino's Fighting Golf

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1988



Despite its title, there is no fighting in *Lee Trevino's Fighting Golf*, but it does offer clearly defined graphics, four distinctive golfers of varying abilities (including "Super Mex" himself), two 18-hole courses (Japanese and American), three modes of play (Stroke, Nassau, and Practice), and a three-tap swing system, making for a solid video representation of the popular sport. Players can select clubs, apply backspin to the ball, aim the ball high or low, and hit a draw, fade, or straight shot. Obstacles include wind, water, out of bounds, bunkers (standard and hard), and roughs (super, light, heavy, and deep). Like the two-player arcade version (SNK, 1988), multiple overhead and behind-the-golfer viewpoints are employed.

Memories: This deceptively titled game appears to have been parodied in an episode of *The Simpsons*. A video game called *Lee Carvallo's Putting Challenge* plays a key role in "Marge Be Not Proud," the eleventh episode of season seven.

Notable Quotable:

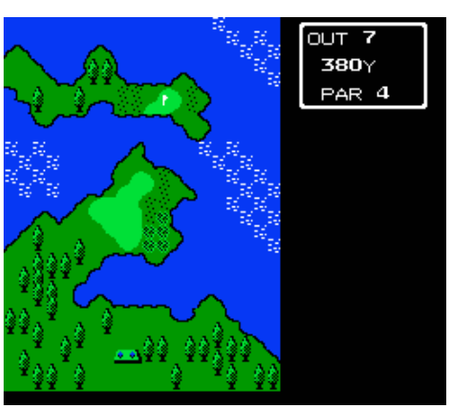
"Unreliable visual feedback makes taking risks less enjoyable and encourages a more boring and standard way of playing, the limits of your golfer being the determiner of your performance since you can't always trust your eyes. Even discounting visual inconsistency, the A.I.'s strange shifting from professional play to inexplicable idiocy makes them a poor opponent. While the mechanics and hole layouts almost made it decent but forgettable, *Lee Trevino's Fighting Golf* instead ends up a game that disappoints both in name and in play." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Golfers will be able to scratch their golf itch with the game, while nongolfers will get a highly enjoyable taste of what the game's about . . .beating the computer player is—you'll pardon the pun—rough . . .the scenery and the animation of the golfers and ball are first rate . . .properly jaunty music and fine sound effects . . .the wind tends to over-affect the ball, but otherwise the game is extremely satisfying; the ball plays with incredible realism on the different surfaces of the various greens." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"An impressive features list . . . The graphics are okay for a game of this sort, but lack the detail found in most current games. One nice touch is that the players sometimes express joy, disappointment, and anger, depending on what happened to the current shot. The sound effects are largely limited to the splash of the ball landing in one of the many water obstacles and the rustling of leaves or a ricochet as the ball fails to clear a tree. The theme music is relaxing—kind of pastoral—and appropriate for a golf game . . . Good shots feel almost as good as ones made on a real course . . .frustrating but fun." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Legacy of the Wizard

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software
DEVELOPER: Nihom Falcom
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1989

Many years ago a powerful wizard imprisoned a dragon that was terrorizing the forest. Now that dragon has revived, and you must use the power of the wizard's descendants, the Drasle family, to stop the dragon once again. This requires recovering four crowns to procure the DragonSlayer, a magical sword that is the only weapon powerful enough to do the job. You guide members of the Drasle family (one at a time) through vast underground caverns comprised of hundreds of rooms, battling such creatures as killer bats, slime crawlers, scorpions, and claw eyes. You'll also climb ladders, push blocks to solve puzzles, and use magic. You can use gold to purchase items, and certain defeated monsters leave items behind. Said items include shields, wings, health elixirs, keys (for opening doors and chests), crosses (which zap all onscreen enemies), gloves (for moving certain blocks), power boots (for jumping on enemies), jump shoes (for higher jumps), fire rods (which increase the range of the current weapon), and more. Each family member has different strengths and weaknesses, and each must be used to complete the quest, making for a complex adventure.

Notable Quotable:

"It's certainly not the most polished game in the world; it's glitchy and parts of it are kind of rough and half-baked, but it has a sort of warmth in its design. Its fun aesthetic, varied gameplay, and satisfying exploration all make for an enjoyable experience." —Game Complaint Department (gamecomplaintdepartment.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Surviving in the dungeons requires quick reflexes and quick wits. However, the task never has the nearly impossible feel to it that some games of this type can have . . . The variety of characters, with their different attributes, keeps the game interesting and challenges you to use each character to best advantage . . .strategic thinking is extremely important in this game as you seek the hidden crowns." —*Computer Entertainer* (May 1989)

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Insider Insight: No game on the NES exemplifies the word "mystery" to me more than *Legacy of the Wizard*. I rented this game as a kid, but the video shop didn't have the instruction manual with it. Instead they had one of those weird little one-paragraph cards plastered to the back of the hard plastic case they rented the games in that told you the basics of how to play and the story. They were never very accurate and they left a lot to be desired. As a result, I never really had any idea what I was supposed to be doing in *Legacy of the Wizard*, but I knew I wanted to do more of it. The graphics and sound were enthralling, and coupled with my complete lack of understanding of the gaming world I was in, it made for the perfect mysterious rental. – Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

Insider Insight: I've always felt that *Legacy of the Wizard* doesn't get much love, and while I love the game, I understand why others might not. My friend Chad would come up from Bismarck, North Dakota, every summer, and he would always have this game in hand. While we put plenty of hours into *Dragon Warrior*, *Wizards & Warriors*, and *The Legend of Zelda*, *Legacy of the Wizard* made it into our rotation, but we didn't understand it very well. We knew that we had to take each family member (including their pet monster) out into the dungeon beneath their home to find one of four crowns that would then unlock the way to the Dragon Slayer sword that allowed you to beat the boss of the game, but we didn't really know HOW to go about doing that. Since this game is an early example of what we now categorize in the "Metroidvania" subgenre we got lost and frustrated very easily, and thus didn't spend much time with the game.

It wasn't until years later, when Chad moved to the area where I grew up and I could easily borrow the game from him, that I would truly grow to appreciate how great it is. The music when you first enter the dungeon really sets the tone for the game; it's foreboding, but welcoming at the same time. And once I figured out that most items can only be used by certain members of the family and how to use them I felt like the game opened up to me, and I was determined to beat it. I'm really glad that I took the time to figure out how the game works and that it's not just a straightforward platformer. If you're a fan of complex, non-linear, Metroidvania-style games and haven't played this one, you really should. —John Trenbeath, Co-organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

The Legend of Kage

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Tose
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987

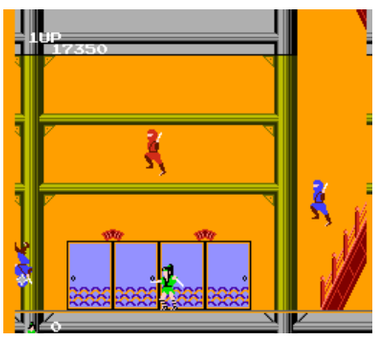
Brief but playable, *The Legend of Kage* (pronounced kah-gay) for the NES is a solid port of Taito's 1984 arcade mini-classic. Armed with throwing stars and a sword that is severely limited in range (it will kill bad guys at close range and block enemy weaponry), the ninja of the title, guided by the player, must work his way through four extremely short scenes: Forest (climb and jump through trees, battle shinobis and yohbohs); Passage (run, swim, defeat 10 shinobis to reach the next level); Fortress (climb fortress walls, battle bomb-throwing shinobis); and Castle (battle through each castle level and rescue Kiri). Kage can jump far above the treetops, but once he is in the air the player cannot change his direction or cut short the jump, making for some frustrating deaths. Power-ups, including eight-way throwing knives and a shadow ninja, are hidden, as are certain exits. Kage moves with style, but most action fans will prefer a longer, more grounded adventure.

Notable Quotable:
"A very lively ninja adventure . . . The action is very fast . . .a real winner: very detailed graphics, excellent animation, good music and sound, and plenty of fighting action. – *Computer Entertainer* (September 1987)

Notable Quotable:
"At first glance one might mistake *Legend of Kage* for crap . . . Kage's high-jumping antics are absolutely ridiculous and totally awesome at the same time. Sure, you'll take some random hits, but the frenetic pace is exciting . . .challenging and so addicting you'll keep coming back to beat your high score. Give it a try and you'll see why so many kids spent countless hours playing this back in the day." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"A horrible game . . .some of the weakest graphics, worst gameplay, and most annoying sound ever to come from the NES . . . Six-year-olds have rendered more realistic ninja scenes in MS Paint than what you'll find in *The Legend of Kage* . . . *Kage*'s one-hit deaths feel cheap, because more often than not they're the result of fighting against the game's stilted, stiff, floaty controls . . .began life as a serviceably playable arcade coin-op cabinet . . . But the downgrade in graphics, sound, and feel of the gameplay was so severe in its port to Nintendo's home system that any kind of fun the arcade original may have held was washed completely away" —Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com)

Insider Insight: Yes, we all called this "Legend of Cage" growing up. We didn't know any better, much like we didn't know how to pronounce "Ninja Gaiden." This wasn't a great game, but there was something fun about jumping really high and far that made me keep playing it. It was also enjoyable to throw ninja stars and stab ninjas while jumping about. I have great memories of playing the game in my cousins' basement, trying to see which one of us could get farther in the game and getting mad if the other player managed to get past where we had reached previously. It was cool seeing how the scenery changed with the passing of each season. It may not have been a great game, but it was certainly playable. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast



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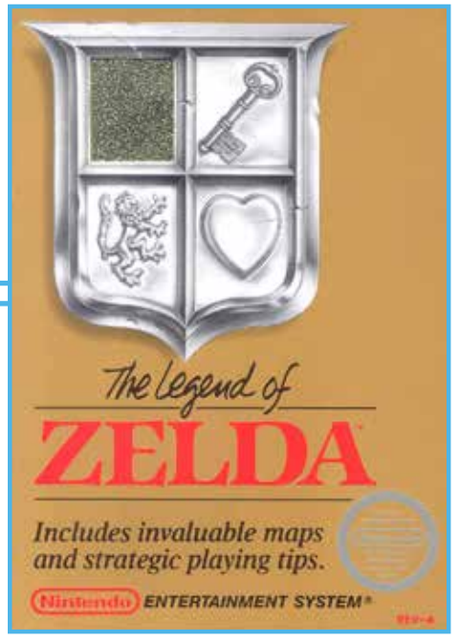
The Legend of Zelda

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D4
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1987



Created by Shigeru Miyamoto, with assistance from Takashi Tezuka and Eiji Aonuma—the man responsible for such classics as *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*—*The Legend of Zelda* was, for many Americans, their first role-playing game. In fact, worried that the game might confuse players, Nintendo included a toll free number in the manual players could call the company for help. This was the genesis of Nintendo's game counselor hotline which, during its peak, maintained a staff of 200 operators.

An action-oriented RPG, *Zelda*, which is viewed from a top-down perspective, borrowed some of the exploration elements of *Adventure* for the Atari 2600, but upped the ante considerably (to put it mildly) with larger worlds to explore, vastly superior graphics, ingeniously conceived puzzles, a sweeping musical score, and a much greater emphasis on hack-and-slash swordplay.

As with virtually any RPG, gameplay, which takes place long ago when the world was in chaos, is story driven. Players control a young, elfin hero named Link as he journeys through Hyrule, hoping to defeat the evil Ganon, rescue Princess Zelda (whom Ganon is holding captive), and restore the fabled land to its former glory. To perform this considerable task Link must find the eight fragments of the Triforce of Power (also called the Triforce of Wisdom).

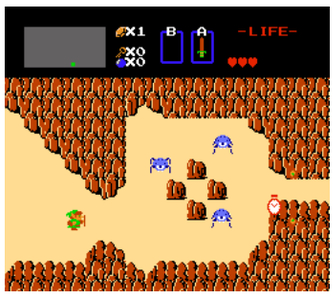
The Legend of Zelda takes place in two areas: the Overworld, which is brightly lit and filled with forests, lakes, and mountains; and the Underworld, which is an underground maze of dangerous labyrinths. The Triforce segments are hidden within the Underworld. The action starts in the Overworld, but there are many entrances to the Underworld, including some hidden deep in the forests and mountains. The intricate world Miyamoto created for the game was inspired by the programmer's childhood, in which he explored the caves, lakes, forests, and villages of his native Sonobe, Japan.

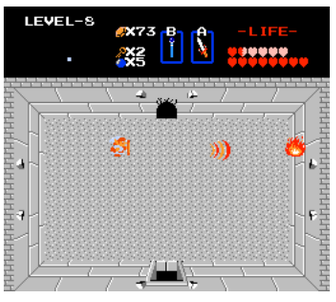
Link relies heavily on his sword and shield to fight the assortment of creatures he will encounter in the land of Hyrule. He can upgrade his standard weaponry and he can use (and store in inventory accessible via a sub-screen) such items as a compass, a map, keys, a ladder (for crossing holes and rivers), a raft (for crossing seas and lakes), boomerangs (wooden and magical), bows, arrows (wooden and silver), rings (which reduce damage inflicted by enemies), a magical clock (for freezing enemies), a power bracelet (for lifting rocks), candles (to light the way), a magic wand and book (for casting fiery spells), and bombs (for destroying enemies and opening holes in walls).

Rupees, which act as currency for purchasing items from merchants, are scattered throughout the kingdom, and the items can be used in a variety of ways to solve puzzles, including tantalizing moments when you can see items and areas, yet not access them directly. The combat is better than in most RPGs, with Link battling a nice assortment of creatures that pounce, fly, fire spears, shoot fireballs, walk in varying patterns and at different speeds, and more. Enemy types include Tektite (spidery things), Octorok (octopuses that spit rocks), Peahat (flower ghosts), Molblin (bulldog-like goblins), and Armos (stone soldiers), among others.

Encased in a shiny gold cartridge (and later in traditional gray), *The Legend of Zelda* was the first NES game to feature battery backup for saving progress (there are three save slots), it's the fourth-best-selling NES title of all time, and it's one of the most influential games in the history of the industry, paving the way for numerous like-minded action RPGs to follow. Followed by *Zelda II—The Adventure of Link*.

Memories: I don't really like role-playing games because I don't have the patience for them and tend to get lost, but I absolutely





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loved *The Legend of Zelda*, which was more of an action/adventure game with RPG elements. I was perfectly content backtracking, making maps, exploring non-linear worlds, and other things that I typically don't enjoy. For some odd reason—and I'll admit this is strange—I would listen to *John Denver's Greatest Hits* while playing the game. It went perfectly with the action. (Don't knock it till you've tried it.)

Notable Quotable:

"A massive arcade adventure . . .an enormous country to examine . . . Graphics and sound are excellent . . .playability is supreme." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"Music that no one can forget . . .unforgettable adventure . . .incredibly huge world . . . addicting . . .perfect in every conceivable way." —*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *The Legend of Zelda* the greatest video game of all time

Notable Quotable:

"When I was younger, I grew up in the countryside of Japan. And what that meant was I spent a lot of my time playing in the rice paddies, exploring the hillsides, and having fun outdoors. When I got into the upper elementary school ages—that was when I really got into hiking and mountain climbing. There's a place near Kobe where there's a mountain, and you climb the mountain, and there's a big lake near the top of it. We had gone on this hiking trip and climbed up the mountain, and I was so amazed—it was the first time I had ever experienced hiking up this mountain and seeing this big lake at the top. And I drew on that inspiration when we were working on the *Legend of Zelda* game, and we were creating this grand outdoor adventure where you go through these narrowed, confined spaces and come upon this great lake. And so it was around that time that I really began to start drawing on my experiences as a child and bringing that into game development." —*The Legend of Zelda* creator Shigeru Miyamoto (via www.npr.org)

Notable Quotable:

"*Zelda* was one of the early games for Nintendo, and at one time had a breakfast cereal named after it. Given the limitations of the 8-bit Nintendo system, *Zelda* is a tremendous game." —*Dragon* (October 1993)

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Insider Insight: *The Legend of Zelda* is my favorite video game series of all time; however, the first *Zelda* game is one that I still have not completed to this day. I've always had trouble keeping up with where I am on the map and what I'm supposed to do. I discovered the game when I went to Children's Palace and saw the gold box. I saw through the hole that the cart itself was golden as well and that sold me on it. At the time there was nothing else really like this game. It set the standard for open-world adventure titles and continues to inspire game designers today. My fondest memories of the game revolve around playing with my older brother and figuring out how to solve puzzles and discovering new dungeons and sections of the map that we previously weren't able to access. It felt like everything in *Legend of Zelda* was one big mystery, and it was such an intriguing experience for me at such a young age. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

Insider Insight: My introduction to the world of Hyrule was largely by accident. All I knew was what I had heard from friends back in 1988, and I had never actually seen the game in action. When my father asked me what I wanted for my birthday—an open invitation to ask for video games—I instinctively stated *Super Mario Bros. 2*, which I would play on the NES I had borrowed from a friend. Amazingly he replied, "That's all?" I was put on the spot, first of all because I wasn't expecting him to offer me a second game. Also, I couldn't really think of any other major NES game I wanted to own.

As a Sega guy, my knowledge of what were considered quality Nintendo wares was limited. All I could think of was *The Legend of Zelda*, which I had seen only in a few magazine screen shots. Why not, though? A gift was a gift, so I tossed Link in with Mario and hoped for the best. When the box arrived and I parted the thin layer of packing peanuts on top there was that glorious gold box sitting to the right of Mario's mustachioed mug.

One thing Nintendo games always did well was the manuals. Full color and glossy, they were a delightful treasure trove of game art and information, and *Zelda*'s was just beautiful. In the days before the internet, and with me lacking a subscription to *Nintendo Power*, that manual was the only friend I had for many tense nights spent exploring the dungeons of Hyrule. It was one of the defining gaming moments of my life, and I didn't even own an NES! That all changed with *The Legend of Zelda*, and it was then that I knew what my next Christmas gift would be. —Ken Horowitz, administrator of Sega-16.com, author of *Playing at the Next Level: A History of American Sega Games* and *The Sega Arcade Revolution: A History in 62 Games*

Insider Insight: Back in summer 1996, I got into video games for the first time. I was familiar with some Super Nintendo games because of the friends I hung out with around the neighborhood, but I didn't have my own console. My grandpa would take me to the arcade at the mall and that was about it.

During the week I would be carted off to a "daycare" while my grandparents went to work. My friend's grandma watched us,

The Legend of Zelda

and his mom still had a room in the second story of her house. One day we found something that would change our lives. We normally did not go upstairs, but something pulled us up there. We found something in his mom's room that we had not noticed before. In a drawer under the TV was an NES and a bunch of games. We hooked up the console to the old tube TV and began to sort through the cartridges—games like *Gun. Smoke* and *Duck Hunt*—but one game really jumped out at us.

Like a pirate's plunder, we saw something different in that box of games. It was a cartridge that stood out like a gold nugget in a pile of coal. We pulled the golden cartridge out and read the words "Legend of Zelda." As we popped the game in, we were greeted with music and a title screen that was unforgettable.

Even though the game was 10 years old, we spent many weeks after that day running upstairs to play it. It was a favorite among us for a long time. It was my introduction to the *Zelda* series and later fueled my love for *Link's Awakening* on the Game Boy. This is one of the fondest video gam[illegible] mories of my childhood and it was sp[illegible] h some of my earliest friends. —Ale[illegible] mpson, Producer and Writer for PopNerdTV

Insider Insight: My earliest memories of *The Legend of Zelda* revolve around the first commercials that Nintendo produced to promote the game. One in particular showed a seemingly deranged man blurting out the names of the various enemies—"Octoroks!," "Tektites!," "Leevers!"—while briefs clips of Link wandering around Hyrule were interspersed. Needless to say this commercial left a lasting impression, even if wasn't a terribly positive one. Eventually I began to hear things about *The Legend of Zelda* from friends that had their NES a few months before me, and I was starting to warm up to the idea of getting the game for myself.

I finally got my own copy as an Easter gift in 1988. By then I knew enough kids with the game to already have a general idea of how to play. Thankfully, I didn't know all the secrets before then. The best part of playing *The Legend of Zelda* through for the first time was the sense of discovery and finding out secrets yourself. There was so much to see and do that my initial feeling of being overwhelmed by the game soon turned into a sense of awe as it all started to click.

The Hyrule overworld map that came with the game quickly became filled with notes of locations to bomb, where to use the candle to burn bushes, locations of heart containers, locations of dungeons, etc. When it was all said and done the map ended up looking like a hieroglyphic-filled cheat sheet. Once I defeated Gannon, the second quest kept me challenged for another several months afterward—a brilliant way to keep the game fresh a little bit longer. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

Insider Insight: *The Legend of Zelda* stretched the fabric of imagination in many young gamers of its time. Following the infamous Great Video Game Crash of 1983, it looked as though the console industry in the US was dead. That was until Nintendo reignited the public's interest and investors' faith with the Nintendo Entertainment System. As with most historically troubled industries on the verge of implosion, the mid-'80s crash was greatly attributed to a massive overpopulation of lackluster games in pandemic proportions compounded by general market oversaturation. Nintendo, having spent most of the last century making playing cards and a handful of arcade games, took a huge chance with the NES console. And it paid off in historic proportions.

Among the early wave of games for the NES was a special, gold-colored cartridge that housed one of history's greatest treasures, *The Legend of Zelda*. The game takes place in the overhead world and underground labyrinths of Hyrule. Our southpaw hero, Link, quests to find the fragments of a powerful artifact, the Triforce, and ultimately rescue the kingdom's princess, Zelda, from the clutches of the evil Ganon. *Zelda* plays like an action/adventure game with hints of RPG elements and is presented in an overhead view. The player is tasked with interpreting clues to locate various items, locate the hidden labyrinths, and defeat a multitude of boss enemies. The journey is of such a large and time-consuming scope that the cartridge was the first game ever to contain a battery backup system to save your progress even after the console was powered down.

It was always with a great sense of wonderment and satisfaction when one of the game's more difficult puzzles could be solved. Keeping in mind that this was in a time before the internet, figuring out the game's mysteries was usually a lone task. I remember waking up one night and believing I had solved the hidden labyrinth/pond/flute thing and couldn't wait until morning to try out my theory. When my hunch worked I blew the minds of the other kids in my neighborhood. Considering that *The Legend of Zelda* is more than three decades old, it still holds up extremely well. The series now encompasses nearly 20 games, and its characters frequently pop up in crossovers of all kinds. Some will say that there are other titles in the franchise that are better than the original, but I've always held a special place for this game. Aside from saving the princess, *The Legend of Zelda* did something much more historically important, in that it helped to revive video games as we now know them. Who would have guessed that only a few short years after Atari was burying a surplus of their games in a desert landfill that a game like this would rise from the ashes of industry despair and sell more than 6.5 million copies?!? Stay golden! —Brian "CIVICMINDED" Lesyk, co-host of the Pass the Controller gaming show

Insider Insight: It was mid-December, and I was snooping through the house for presents. The corner of a shopping bag was just visible at the back of my parents' closet, but it was enough. Moving aside the baseball cards meant for my older brother, I saw a golden box with a shimmering gold cartridge visible through a cutout: *The Legend of Zelda*. I had heard friends talk about it. I had seen the photos in *Nintendo Power*. But I had no idea how influential this game would be; not only would it define a generation of gamers and spawn countless sequels, clones, and hacks, but it would set the benchmark against which

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I would judge all future action/RPG games.

There was so much more to this game than any other I had played. It had a story, artfully told in the instruction manual, and a fold-out map with incomplete segments; what could be up in those undefined corners?

I vividly remember my first attempt at the game. Something almost magical drew me into the cave where I met an old man and took his gift of a wooden sword (It's dangerous to go alone!). I wandered aimlessly for about four or five screens before an Octorok killed me. This quick death is a little embarrassing in retrospect, but it prompted me to try again, to be more cautious, and I eventually conscripted my brother to help with more difficult parts. I drew maps of labyrinths on graph paper and marked secret passages. I left no monster standing. No stone un-pushed or un-pulled. No wall un-bombed. No bush unburned. And yet there were some secrets I still couldn't unlock. Where the hell is labyrinth seven? What is "enemy bait" used for? Are those the silver arrows? Since there was no internet, finding answers to these questions meant asking fri[illegible]at school or finding an old copy of N[illegible] *Power* at a game store.

I will always remember the joy I felt when finally taking hold of the whistle. There was a sense of mystery when I walked through a waterfall, satisfaction when I bombed Spectacle Rock, and triumph when I held the Magical Sword (Master Sword). I will never forget my first visit to the sixth labyrinth, with unlit rooms and Wizzrobes; the game had become decidedly darker, and more difficult. I can still feel the defeat of losing my Magic Shield to a Like-Like and the helplessness of not being able to swing my sword after touching a bubble. And my father still remembers the moment when I defeated Ganon—my screams of joy being mistaken for screams of pain as he tore through the house and into my bedroom.

There is little question that many of this game's sequels have surpassed it in every way, but this was the first game I played that truly offered an open world, new abilities that expanded the game, and a sense of wonder that is impossible to reproduce. *The Legend of Zelda* is truly legendary! —Andy Slaven, freelance writer, co-author of the *Video Game Bible*

Insider Insight: There's probably not a whole lot that I could say about *The Legend of Zelda* that hasn't already been reiterated in countless gaming articles, reviews, or books now more than 30 years since the game's original release. One would have to be utterly mad to dispute *The Legend of Zelda* being one of the most important video games ever developed, and certainly being one of the crown jewels in the Nintendo Entertainment System's library. It's mind-boggling to think of how much game design brilliance is crammed into this cartridge. There is a near-perfect balance between real-time action and more traditional RPG elements, combined with a simple, yet charming story set within a colorful and character-filled fantasy world seemingly inspired by modern fantasies like Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal*.

Designed by the legendary Shigeru Miyamoto, the game was originally intended as a build-your-own-dungeon experience and less of a defined game. That ambitious design, though, was pared down before *The Legend of Zelda* as we know it was first released on the Famicom Disk System in Japan (the disk's writeable nature had been key to realizing the original "dungeon editor" idea, intending for players to be able to share their custom-built dungeons with one another). The game was ported to the cartridge format for western audiences a short time later, helping pioneer the idea of battery backed memory in game cartridges. With the game's early success in Japan Nintendo knew they had something special on their hands, and in an inspired bit of marketing genius, the game shipped to North America installed in shiny, golden cartridges that became every bit as iconic as the game's timeless graphics and audio.

The Legend of Zelda's soundtrack is still considered by many to be one of the greatest video game soundtracks of all time, and instantly recognizable amongst gamers of all ages around the world. Bundled along with the shimmering golden cartridge, a large foldout map and fully illustrated manual told the dark fairy tale of the evil sorcerer Ganon and the entrapped Princess Zelda, giving players a glimpse of the brave new world they were about to enter from the moment they opened the box. The magic began before players even pressed the power button.

For me, the game initially made a somewhat less impressive entrance, but its impact has lasted for decades. I was around 10 or 11 the first time I played it. My dad came home one Saturday morning after a round of looking for power tools and fishing gear at local pawn shops with a handful of loose NES cartridges he'd snagged on the cheap, including *Metroid*, *Contra*, and *The Legend of Zelda*. I bet he didn't pay more than five bucks apiece for the batch of classics, but he may as well have come home with the spoils of a sunken Spanish galleon. My brothers and I (along with many of our friends) played those games to death.

Somehow *Zelda* always became a group activity, despite it being a single-player game. We were constantly making our own maps, tracking every last secret passage and hidden treasure we could find, and we were always looking for new tips and tricks. Imagine our dismay at the game's infamous second quest upon rescuing Princess Zelda! Imagine our utter disbelief when we learned you could skip straight to the second quest just by entering 'Zelda' as your save file's name! We played through the game so many times, though, we started making up our own challenges, setting constraints that we would have to adhere to as we played: going without a sword for as long as possible, or beating the dungeons out of sequence, or just speed running the game without saving, etc.

We somehow managed to give the game seemingly limitless replay value. I'm not sure how much of that was by design on Nintendo's part, and I doubt even Nintendo could have imagined the game's staying power 30-plus years later, but seeing how far the franchise established by *The Legend of Zelda* has come and where it now stands in the annals of gaming, I doubt anyone could ever question its greatness as a game and its importance to the video game medium in general. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

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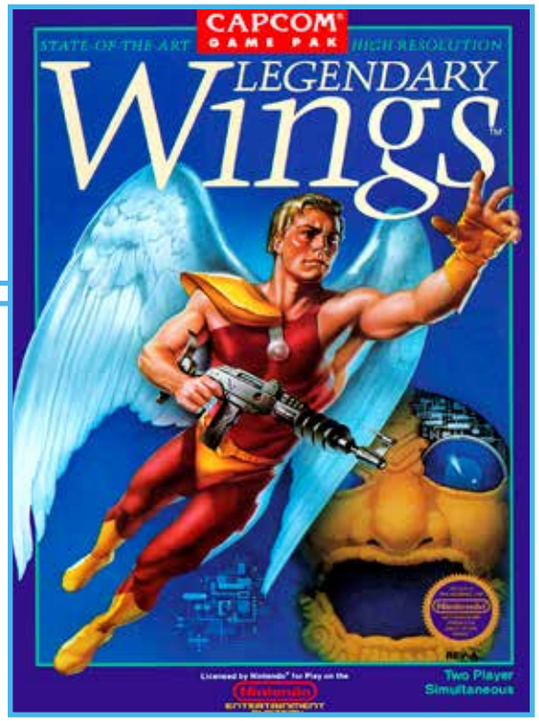
Legendary Wings

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter/Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



In *Legendary Wings*, gamers guide a winged soldier over land and sea, shooting, bombing (ground-based targets only), and/or avoiding dragons, stone faces, horseshoe crabs, ninjas, earwigs, snails, seahorses, and other baddies, some of which move in *Galaga*-like formations. Unfortunately, there is little incentive to kill entire formations since scoring is absent, and since power-ups (twin lasers, penetration shots, flame shots, and firebirds) are obtained by shooting individual enemies. In Capcom's 1986 arcade original, destroying every enemy in a formation grants players bonus points or power-ups. In addition, the side-scrolling stages in the coin-op game are largely of the platform shooter variety. For some reason the NES rendition opts for flight based horizontal action. As expected, the arcade game has crisper, more colorful graphics. Despite the differences and shortcomings compared to its progenitor, the game is a solid, fairly intense shooter that should appeal to fans of such classics as *Xevious* and *Dragon Spirit*.

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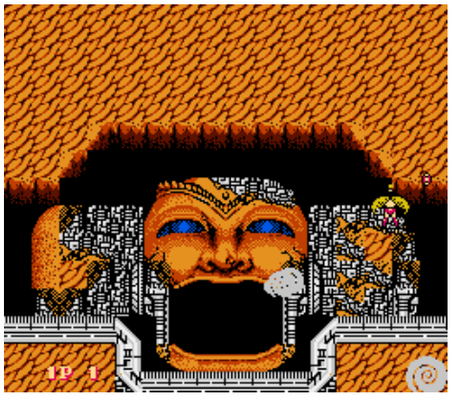
Notable Quotable:
"Combines the magic of the Greek myth of Icarus and Daedalus with the best gameplay aspects of *Alpha Mission* and *Gradius*. A few more levels would have been nice, though." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"A wonderful weapon system, two types of scrolling levels, plenty of secrets to find, and best of all it allows for two-player simultaneous gaming…memorable music and detailed graphics" —Craig Majaski (nintendotimes.com)

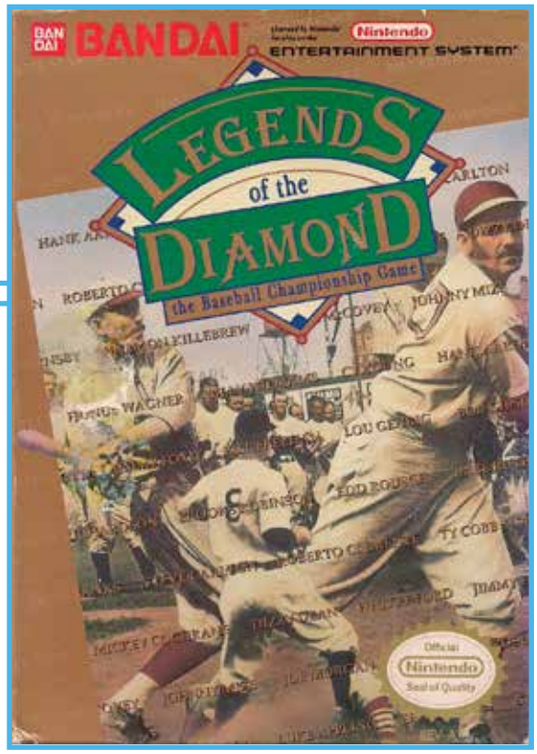
Insider Insight: There was a *Legendary Wings* arcade cabinet at the pizza parlor around the corner from my childhood home in Wenonah, New Jersey. On snowy days my friends and I would go door to door and beg our neighbors to let us shovel their sidewalks and driveways, which usually would get us around $3–5 per house. Once the sun would start setting we'd head over to the pizza parlor to grab a pie, then use the rest of the earnings on the *Legendary Wings* cabinet. Although the music was awesome and the game was fun and full of secrets, it was just too hard, and we never could beat it.

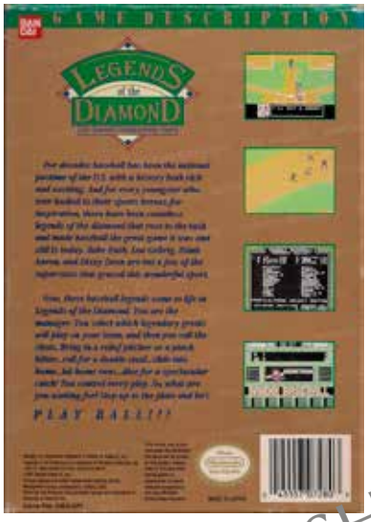
That summer I saw a magazine ad for the NES home version, and I begged my parents to get it, but they gave me a hard "no." Like many kids I only received one or two games per year, and those usually only came on birthdays or Christmas. That Christmas my parents came through and got it for me, which resulted in me wasting my whole vacation trying to beat it—the NES version is even more difficult than the arcade game. It wasn't until the release of the Game Genie that I would finally see the ending, and what a terrible broken-English ending it was! "You have saved human race from its extinction. Thank you for playing." Hey, at least the spelling was correct. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com



Legends of the Diamond

PUBLISHER: Bandai
DEVELOPER: Tose
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1992





Unlike most baseball video games, which feature fictional characters or contemporary Major League stars, *Legends of the Diamond* showcases 30 baseball greats of the past, including such legendary figures as Cy Young, Ernie Banks, Hank Aaron, Dizzy Dean, Lou Gehrig, Honus Wagner, Ty Cobb, and Babe Ruth (note the conspicuous absence of Mickey Mantle). Players don old-school uniforms, but can play in a modern or a throwback stadium. The limited NES graphics make the players virtually indistinguishable from one another, but it's a neat idea nevertheless. Gameplay evokes *R.B.I. Baseball*, but with wind conditions to make things a little more interesting. Team names are fictional, and gamers can play a solo match or enter an eight-game tournament. Random Mode lets the computer select the players and their positions, while Member Select Mode lets gamers determine their own lineup. Includes pinch hitters, relief pitchers, a tournament mode, pick-off attempts, the ability to dive for balls, and other flourishes. Interestingly, the top of the cartridge label misspells the title as "Legends of the Daimond," and it was never corrected during production, meaning all examples of the game have this unforced error.

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Notable Quotable:

"*Legends of the Diamond* tries to set itself apart from other baseball games on the NES with its lineup of 30 all-time greats . . . But even with this distinction, the game feels more like a generic baseball sim than one built from the ground up with classic players in mind. Although the player graphics are sharp and well animated, they suffer from a pastel color scheme and an overall feeling of sameness. There's no meaningful way to distinguish between, say, Harmon Killebrew and Honus Wagner. You can also choose between an 'old' and 'new' stadium, but they are similarly indistinguishable. The gameplay itself is solid on a technical level but totally lacks any excitement." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The only valuable aspect of the game (having control over the legendary greats of baseball) is negated by the sheer inadequacy of everything else . . .does little but rely on its one gimmick to separate itself from the superior baseball games available for the NES . . .there are no ratings for power, speed, contact, etc. Without stat tracking of player ratings, the potential of seeing stars duke it out with each other for all-time supremacy is lost entirely . . . The lineups are confusingly arranged, with weak hitting speedsters at the top and power sluggers riding the pine . . .atrocious due to the utter lack of reasonable fielding. Simply finding fly balls is an adventure because there's no on-field indicators of your player's positioning." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Lemmings

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

An ingenious and popular puzzler, *Lemmings* for the NES is a respectable port of the classic computer game, despite lacking a two-player mode and voice effects. Players guide a cursor around the screen, assigning such tasks as digging, climbing, bridge building, mining, floating, and bashing to mindless lemmings who walk blindly through the areas to guide them past obstacles and to their goal within a set time limit. Obstacles include lava, saws, spring-loaded traps, steep drops off cliffs, barriers, dangerous passageways, rivers, pools of water, and the like. The game offers 100 levels of play (as opposed to 125 in the SNES version and 180 in the Genesis rendition), and the lemmings flicker a bit when the screen gets crowded. The NES lacks a mouse, meaning computer versions of the game have better controls.

Memories: You don't hear about *Lemmings* as often these days as you did in the past, but the game was seemingly everywhere. It never hit critical mass like the action puzzle *Tetris*, but for an adventure puzzle it was ubiquitous, appearing on countless consoles and spawning numerous sequels and imitators. I've played the Super Nintendo version more than the others—it's a stellar port, though it confoundingly lacks SNES Mouse support.

Notable Quotable:

"*Lemmings* looks clean and visible, considering the tiny 8-bit characters. The catchy theme songs do the cart justice . . . *Lemmings* does a great job of keeping you busy and should find a permanent home in your NES!" – *GamePro* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"In the NES version, the lemmings seem to move a bit faster than most of the other ports. It's a decent port, but there's one weird issue where you can ONLY have music or sound effects while playing the game, never both . . .only 14 lemmings can be on screen at the same time." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

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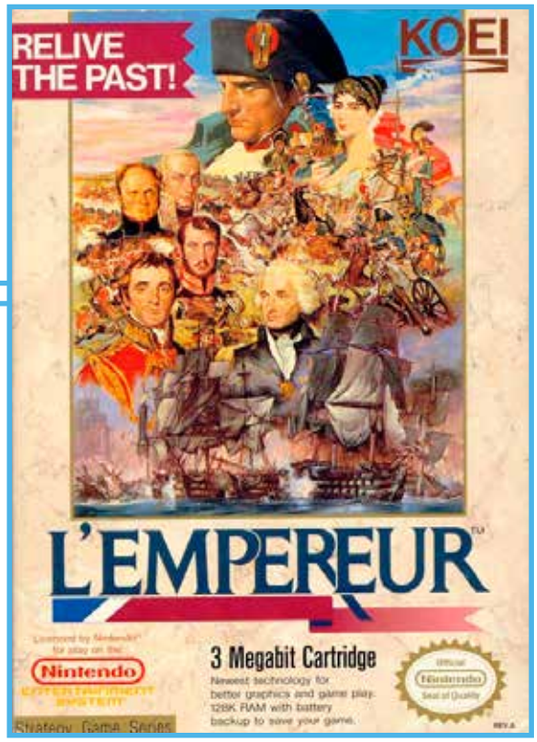
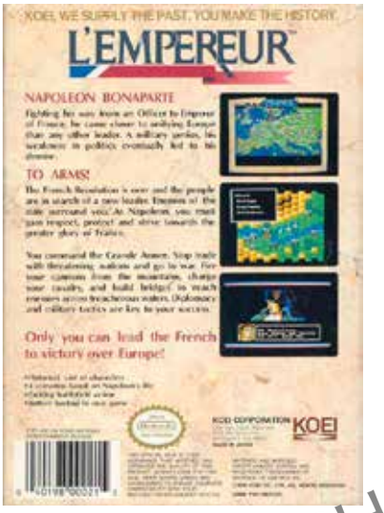
L'Empereur

PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Koei
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 player
YEAR: 1991




KOEI WE SUPPLY THE PAST, YOU MAKE THE HISTORY
L'EMPEREUR
NAPOLEON BONAPARTE
TO ARMS!
Only you can lead the French to victory over Europe!
KOEI

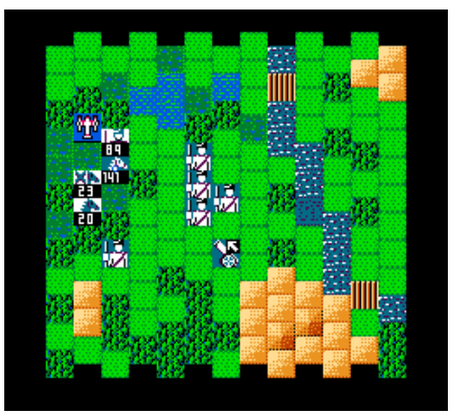
Adapted from the 1989 computer game, *L'Empereur* takes place in the violent aftermath of the French Revolution, putting players in the role of Napoleon Bonaparte, who starts off as Officer in Charge of City Affairs and rises in rank to First Consul and then Emperor. With the goal of unifying Europe (46 European cities are included), Napoleon must recruit and train an army (infantry, cavalry, artillery, and reserves); invade hostile nations (including sea battles); collect taxes; pay stipends; build bridges; survive harsh winters (and other hostile weather conditions); relocate his brothers and son to rule over distant lands; invest in industry and agriculture; fend off strikes, rebellions, and military uprisings; and much more. The turn-based battles take place via a hex map, with terrain consisting of mountains, hills, forests, swamps, grassy plains, sand bars, rivers, lakes, seas, ice, and fortresses. Four game scenarios tell the story of Napoleon's storied life: Napoleon's Beginning, Desire for Power, End of Revolution, and Glorious Empire.

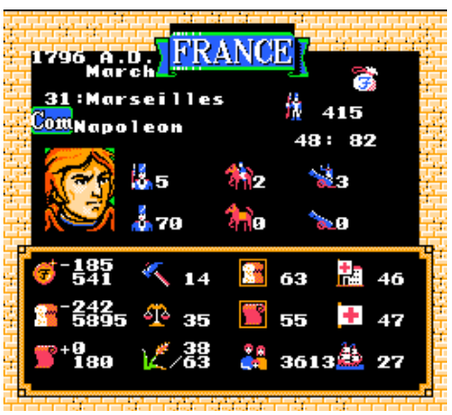
Notable Quotable:

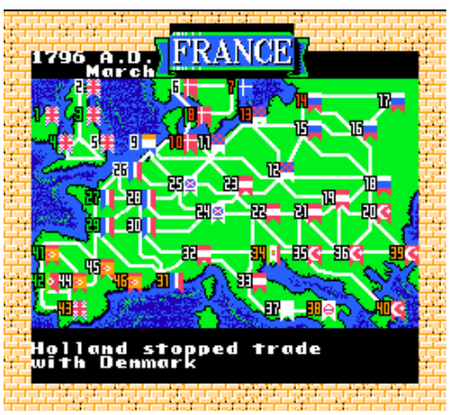
"The only downside is the occasional control issue, which can easily lead to pressing the wrong button at the worst possible time, resulting in a ridiculous faux pas. It's a super-complex strategy game and not for the casual gamer or fledgling strategist. It's not the prettiest either, but when the depth and longevity suck you in, it really doesn't matter." —Jim Evans (*Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985-1995)*)

Notable Quotable:

"Experienced warfarers will find *L'Empereur* similar in concept to board games such as *Risk* and *Axis & Allies*, only much, much more detailed . . . Although the graphics aren't incredibly detailed, the map enables you to see exactly where your armies are located . . . The incredible number of options, the tedious menu shifting, and the drab music make this complex game a challenge for your patience, as well as your brain. On the up side, the unique negotiations feature and the build up for subsequent battles are fun. If marathon military games are your thing *L'Empereur* will prove to be a rewarding conquest." —*GamePro* (November 1991)







SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Lethal Weapon

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software
DEVELOPER: Eurocom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1993

Based on the *Lethal Weapon* franchise rather than one particular film in the series, this game puts players in the role of Murtaugh (who can pick up boxes) or Riggs (who can jump higher than Murtaugh) as they stop a group of mercenaries who are trying to buy weapons from gunrunners, defuse a bomb planted in an exhibition center, stop a bank robbery in progress at a shopping mall while protecting bystanders, defuse a bomb planted on a ship, track down a cache of stolen police weapons, and more. The duo punch, kick, and shoot such commonplace enemies as soldiers, kickboxers, and guards. They also pick up bombs dropped by a helicopter and toss them back up at the flying machine. To toggle between Riggs, whose flying kick has double the strength of his partner, and Murtaugh, whose punch is more effective than Riggs' kick, gamers must walk on the left side of the screen, which is strange. Even stranger is that punching and kicking causes more damage than shooting.

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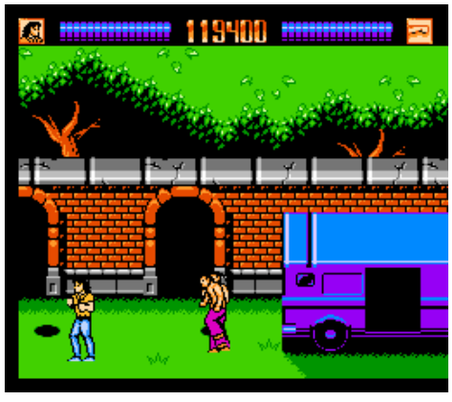
Notable Quotable:

"When the only joy you get out of playing a video game is escaping its crappiness through dying, you know you have a bad game on your hands . . .poorly licensed and thought out bit of drudgery." —The Video Game Museum (www.vgmuseum.com)

Notable Quotable:

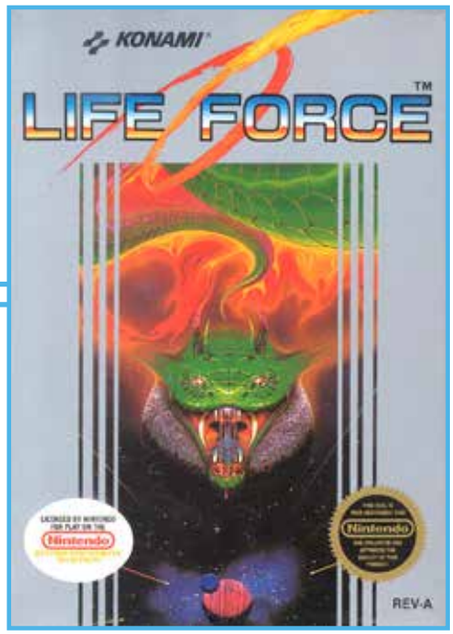
"Wonky, overly difficult, mediocre beat-'em-up . . . The music is serviceable. The title screen theme sells the idea that you are the law . . .but it does not feel like a *Lethal Weapon* film—it would be extremely difficult to replicate the film's soundtrack on the NES . . . But it is a great tune nevertheless. The in-game music, however, is very generic and tends to wash over you like white noise . . .the graphics are cartoony in style, although the character sprites aim more on the side of realistic . . . The game was criticized for shoddy collision control and for not capturing the feel of the films in any way, shape, or form. It was one of the few NES and GB games that *Nintendo Power* awarded low scores to—the NES version scored the lowest with a 2 out of 5." —Stefan Fouracre-Smith (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Memories: When I saw the original Lethal Weapon film at the theater in 1987, the same year I got my first NES console, I was highly impressed with its combination of action, drama, and buddy-cop comedy. Unfortunately, the NES game, which I rented for a kid I was babysitting back in the day, captures little of the movie's greatness.



Life Force

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1988



You battled the Bacterions in *Gradius*, but now it's time to take on the planet devourer, Zelos, in this sequel to that classic game. *Life Force* is similar to its progenitor—complete with manual power-up system—but alters the formula by adding vertical scrolling and two-player simultaneous action. G[illegible]ly their starship through the ins[illegible] of the aforementioned creature, firing lasers at alien vessels, space rocks, a phoenix, a sphinx, a giant brain, and other enemies, including huge bosses and the terrain itself. Certain enemies leave pods when destroyed, and you can grab these to upgrade your ship. Upgrades are selectable through a menu along the bottom of the screen, and with each capsule you grab it cycles through the following: speed up, twin missiles that fire to the sides, ripple lasers, a more powerful straight laser, pods that duplicate your ship's fire, and forcefield. It's up to you to select which power-up to equip. Although it suffers from some slowdown, *Life Force* is a nice port of Konami's 1986 arcade game. The tough-as-nails gameplay and colorfully detailed graphics will thrill shooter fans. If you find it too difficult, enter the famous 30-life Konami code at the title screen: up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, start.

Notable Quotable:

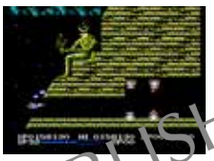
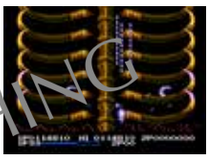
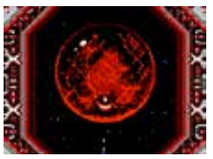
"Who cares if *Life Force* has taken so long to arrive? It is spectacular; it ranks among the elite of Nintendo games. And wouldn't look out of place on a pedestal next to *Super Mario Bros.* . . . The graphics and gameplay are excellent. – *Zero* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Spectacular graphics . . .extremely challenging gameplay . . . Typical of Konami excellence . . . Colorful, crisp, and detailed . . .you'll feel as if you're in an arcade . . .a rip-roaring adventure of lightning-fast response and quick timing . . .loads of fun for any action lover." —*Computer Entertainer* (September 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically, *Life Force* is excellent. The chunky sprites are very colorful and shift round the screen almost faster than the eye can follow. For the first few games many lives will be lost sussing out the countless traps that exist for the unwary. Once the attack patterns have been learnt, however, all hell can be let loose. The wide range of weaponry is very welcome, but it is a tad annoying to have to collect so many power-up orbs to access them." —*The Games Machine* (May 1990)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: My cousin Kelly liked to call *Life Force* "Contra in space." He frequently touted the greatness of the game, and once he explained that it was a pseudo-sequel to *Gradius* I had to play it. I rented the game and blew right through it in one sitting, but this was because I used the Konami Code, which gave you a full set of power-ups from the beginning. Playing it later in life, I appreciated it much more. It looks and sounds great, and if you don't use the Konami Code it is a very challenging game. This was the first game I played that alternated between horizontal and vertical shooting action. The only real complaint I have is that there aren't any Moai Heads as there are in the other *Gradius* games. *Life Force* belongs in every retro gamer's collection. – John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the Bits & Pieces Podcast

Insider Insight: Back in the NES days I was *not* a shoot-'em-up fan. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't get into them like my friends. It seemed like everyone I knew that owned an NES had *Gradius* and they loved it. I did not. I found it boring and too difficult for its own good. I recall saying "I'd rather play *Vanguard* on my 2600" to a friend who was insisting we play it one day while I visited.

Life Force was a different story. A friend had received it as a gift and wanted to show it to me, regardless of my thoughts on the genre. While it was similar to *Gradius*, the environments enthralled me. I was fascinated by horror films, and the fact that I was attempting to destroy a gigantic living creature from its inside just grabbed me. I considered it a horror shoot-'em-up.

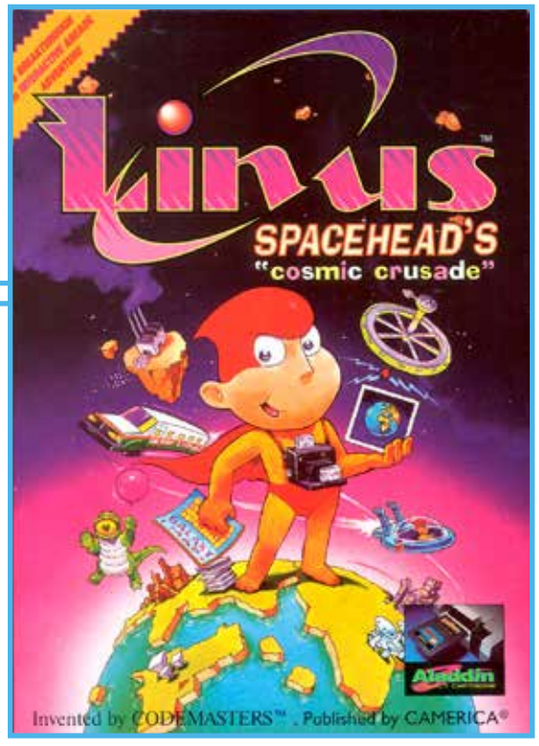
The gameplay is nothing special, especially if you've played *Gradius*. Scroll from left to right, and sometimes vertically, and shoot everything that comes at you. Sometimes the environments come alive and reach out for you, but other than that it's entirely too similar to *Gradius*. Well, except the enemies are things you'd see on a biology final exam, like white blood cells, cancerous growths, germs, and the like. It was fascinating to me and made this a must-have game. And that music—hell, yes!

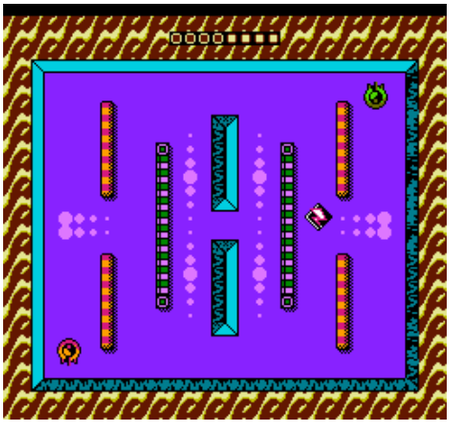
Once I got my own NES a couple years later, I made it my life's mission to get a copy of *Life Force*. Once I did, I spent hours and hours learning the patterns of the enemies and memorizing the layout of the stages. Within a few weeks I had mastered it. In fact, *Life Force* was the first NES game I ever completed.

Nowadays, I'd rather play the arcade version on the Sega Saturn or even the PC Engine rendition, due to it having no slowdown. Still, *Life Force* on the NES is special to me for changing my opinion on an entire genre. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker, and Gamer

Linus Spacehead's Cosmic Crusade

PUBLISHER: Camerica
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Graphic Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992





OSCHIEFER PUBLISHING

The sequel to *Linus Spacehead* from the *Quattro Adventure* multi-title cartridge, *Linus Spacehead's Cosmic Crusade* has two distinct types of gameplay: side-scrolling platformer and point-and-click adventure in the mold of *Maniac Mansion*. In the adventure areas you, as Linus, must solve problems to proceed through the worlds and make it back to Earth so you can prove to your fellow Planet Linoleum denizens that you've been there. Using a cursor to select five commands—look, pick up, talk, give, and use—you will interact with the alien environments in a number of ways, including using a teleport machine; finding the correct keys to enter various areas; mailing a letter; acquiring a passport; and riding a surfboard. Items to use include an anti-gravity slide, a bridge, gunpowder, a missile targeting device, and more, including ice to freeze water. There are mini-games as well, such as a bumper car race and a slot machine. In the platformer stages, which connect the adventure sections of the game, you jump over and otherwise avoid (since you can't attack them) springs, tires, creatures, and other enemies and collect candies to earn extra lives. An Aladdin Deck Enhancer version of the cartridge was also produced. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

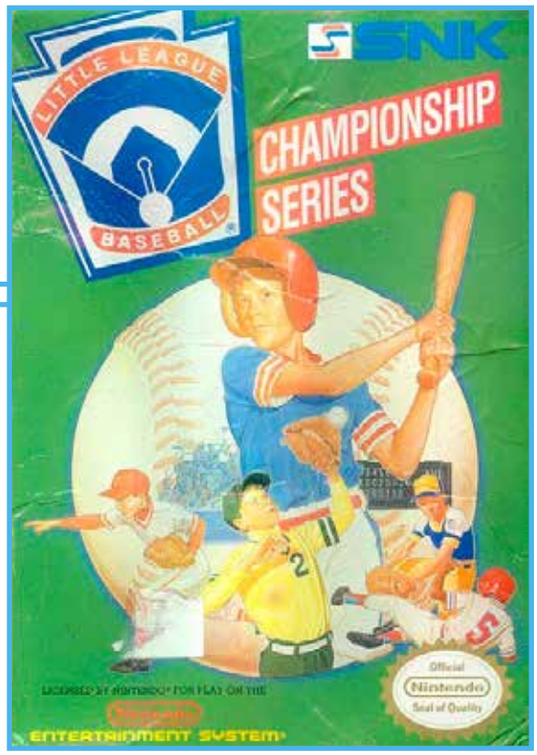
"A cute adventure/platforming hybrid that would've been better off as a straightforward adventure game . . .moving between areas brings up a side-scrolling action stage in which Linus must evade enemies and collect candy to earn extra lives. These stages are tedious and needlessly break up the flow of the game, but fortunately, once you complete an action stage you don't have to go back through it again." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

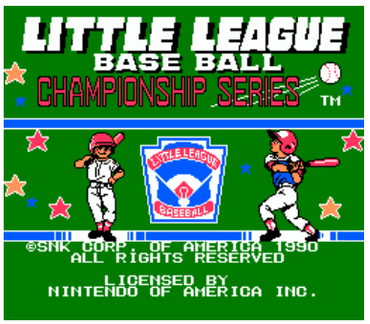
Notable Quotable:

"It's slow, it's ugly . . . The mechanics behind the game—one-part point-and-click, one-part side-scrolling action—are intriguing, but executed poorly. In the point-and-click areas Linus controls as well as you'd expect, but in the action stages it feels like he's on the moon. Not only is our hero a slippery customer (tripping on his cape, perhaps?), but sometimes when you jump onto a platform he'll jump again for no reason at all. I tried to figure out why the double jump occurred at random times, but there was no pattern . . . You can jump over enemies, sure, but he's a superhero! Give him a death ray or something! And what's with the horrible, purple looking backgrounds and brash, obnoxious music?" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Little League Baseball: Championship Series

PUBLISHER: SNK
DEVELOPER: SNK
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990





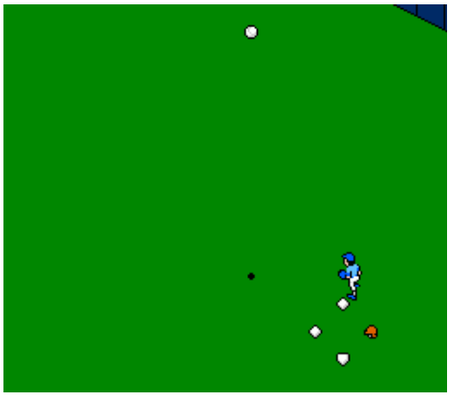
Developed by the company responsible for *Baseball Stars*—one of the most beloved NES sports titles—*Little League Baseball* offers the same type of fun, arcade style action, but with juvenile players and less emphasis on team management and stats. In addition, the game follows official Little League Baseball rules, such as six-inning games and no leading off on bases (though you can steal). Pitchers can throw curves, fastballs, and slowballs, and fielders can dive and jump for the ball. While at bat, you can move around the batter's box, hold on a swing, and try a directional bunt. There are 16 different international teams, each ranked according to pitching, batting, defense, and running. And there are two modes of play: Exhibition and Championship Series. Gameplay is simple and intuitive, and some cool cutscenes add to the game's already top-notch presentation, which includes nice animation and large characters with distinctive traits: chubby, short, lanky, and the like.

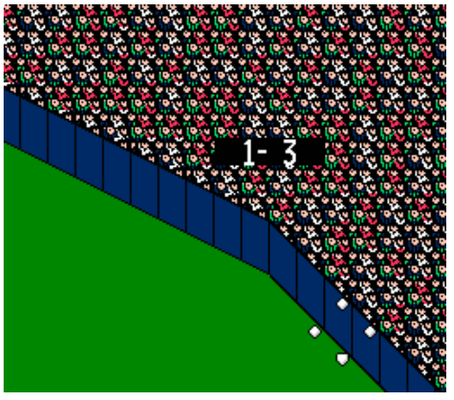
Memories: I grew up playing baseball in our backyard with the neighborhood kids and my family. I loved it and was pretty good at the sport; however, I was always afraid to join organized Little League. Not only was I painfully shy, but the fast pitches, loud ping of the aluminum bat, and fans screaming "Hey, batter, batter, swing!" were super intimidating. When I was in sixth grade I finally worked up the courage to play organized basketball, but never baseball. Oh well, there's always this NES cartridge.

Notable Quotable:
"Succeeds in offering an entertaining edition of the grand old game the way the kids play it . . . You probably won't hit as many home runs as you can in other simulations. However, the options in *Little League* give you plenty of other ways to score. For example, on offense you can call for a squeeze play any time you have a man on third. You can actually lunge for a bad ball to bring your man home . . . Defensive strategies abound . . .you can shift the fielding alignments of both the outfield and the infield . . . Player control is fine tuned." —*Game Players* (July 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Controlling your pitches, batting, running bases, stealing—it's all easily executed . . . Occasionally you'll have difficulty fielding a ball despite the fact that you appear to be right on top of the ball, but this doesn't happen often . . . The CPU is TOUGH. Some teams are scoring machines, and too often they'll bunt, and your pitcher will be too slow to get to the ball to even get the runner out at first . . . The music is quite good . . .different songs play in different games . . .sound effects are average . . .great looking . . .it can stand the test of time much better than some other NES baseball games." —Obscure Video Games (obscurevideogames.com)

Notable Quotable:
"I truly believe baseball games hit perfection with *Little League Baseball*." —Nintendojo (www.nintendojo.com)





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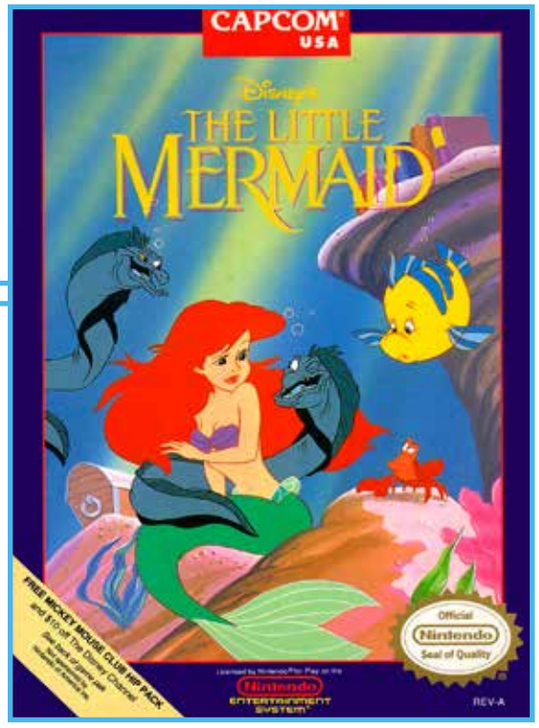
The Little Mermaid

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991



A sequel of sorts to Disney's 1989 animated film, *The Little Mermaid* finds Ursula lording over the denizens of the ocean, prompting Ariel to turn back into a mermaid, say goodbye to her beloved Eric, and return to the water to save her pals Flounder, Sebastian, and Scuttle. Players guide Ariel as she swims through a Sea of Coral, a Sunken Ship, a Sea of Ice, an Undersea Volcano, and Ursula's Castle, avoiding or throwing bubbles at ghosts, eels, sharks, spineballs, and halibut. She also searches for dinglehoppers (forks) and snarfblatts (pipes), which grant extra points; hearts, which provide additional health; and shells, which open treasure chests and knock out enemies. The pearls released from said treasure chests make Ariel faster and strong enough to push rocks and barrels for gaining access to certain items. Cute visuals, charming music, fun action, and easy gameplay (despite exploration elements and a non-linear final level) make the adventure ideal for younger gamers.

Memories: My favorite Disney film of all time is *Pinocchio*, but *The Little Mermaid* is a close second. I love the music and the animation, and I might even have a wee bit of a crush on Ariel, but don't tell anyone. I really enjoy this game as well. I've beaten it and the Sega Genesis game of the same name several times.

Notable Quotable:
"Sparkling graphics, colorful characters, low-key violence, and an enchanting story make *The Little Mermaid* a good family game. And while the gameplay is easy enough for beginners, it's challenging enough to test more-experienced players as well." —*Game Players* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"I have to give Capcom credit for going after a niche market . . . For the younger player, this is a must-have as it is a great nonviolent game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1991)

Insider Insight: *The Little Mermaid* is one of my top NES games of all time. Now, I get what you're thinking—a grown man loving a Little Mermaid game? Absolutely! The first time I played it was when my little sister rented it. Like virtually every other little girl at the time, she was a big fan of the character. I played the Game Boy version as well, which is a near-identical experience. When I'd get a free rental from the local video store for good grades I'd rent the NES game and could breeze right through it, since the Game Boy version was essentially my practicing tool.

The game loosely follows the plot of the Disney animated classic, but it provides a unique Capcom Disney experience that is often underappreciated and overlooked because people label it unfairly as "for little girls only." It features an amazing variety of levels, good music, and excellent gameplay mechanics—I would argue that it is the best Disney NES game. I have so many fond memories renting the game and repeatedly beating it with my little sister. Yes, I absolutely love this game, and as a grown man I don't mind saying so. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

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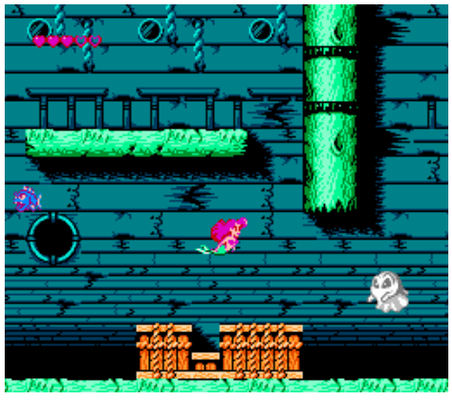
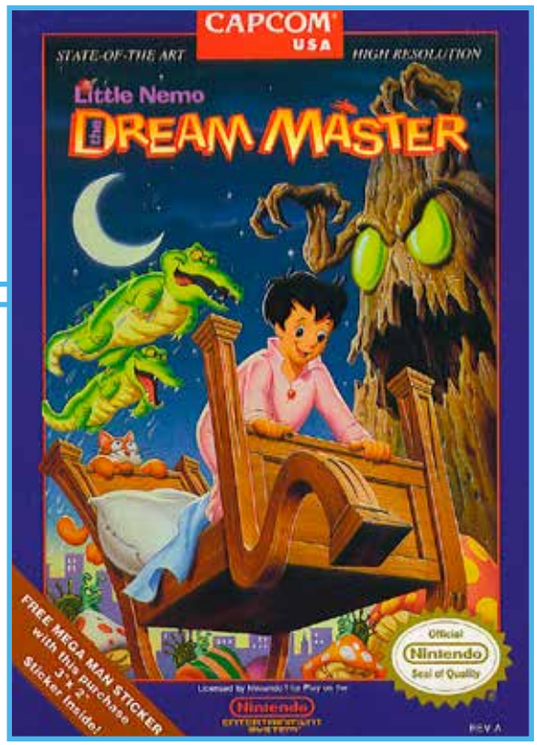


Little Nemo: The Dream Master

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Little Nemo: The Dream Master is based on Windsor McKay's early 1900s comic strip, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, and the 1989 feature film, *Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland*. The game finds the title character—a child—on a mission to rescue King Morpheus and restore peace to Slumberland. The surrealistic platforming action takes Nemo, who can run, jump, and duck, through eight colorful, dream-induced levels: Mushroom Forest, Flower Garden, House of Toys, Night Sea, Nemo's House, Cloud Ruins, Topsy-Turvy, and Nightmare World. The objective in each area is to collect all the keys so Nemo can exit to the next level, so there is plenty of exploration. Nemo will meet numerous animals throughout his adventure. To tame them, ride them, and gain their powers (fly, dig, throw punches, swim, and more), Nemo can feed them candy, making for a varied adventure. Since Nemo is only armed with candy for stunning enemies the animals are not only fun to use, but also super helpful.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

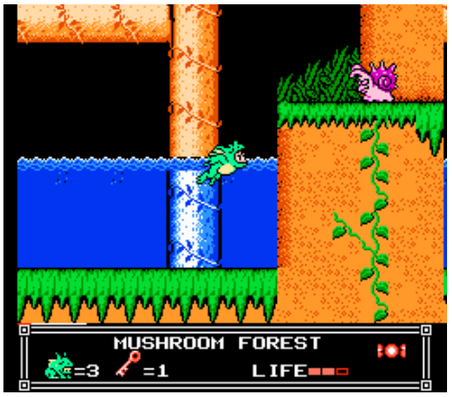
"One of the best games on the NES . . . Impressive, fun, charming, and clever . . . The simple cinema sequences are very softly done, and just as charming as everything else . . .oozes classic NES charm . . .everything is full of vibrant color. The characters are well designed . . . The sound effects and music are excellent as well . . .contains as much personality as you'll ever find in any game." —Racket Boy (www.racketboy.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Nice pastel graphics. The action never gets too furious, but the game remains solid throughout most of the adventure." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

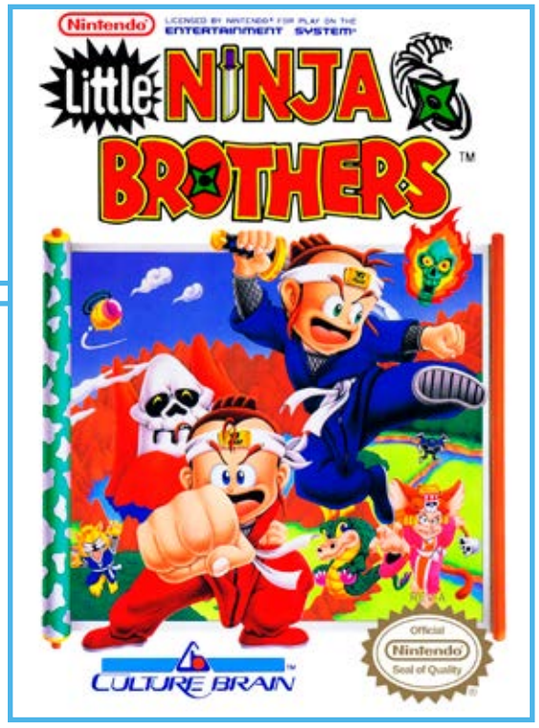
Insider Insight: As a child, I remember the advertising campaign for *Little Nemo* and thinking about how great the game looked. I was already a huge fan of other Capcom titles, and I figured it had to be good. My cousin Tom, who lived four states away, owned the game. When we visited his house one holiday, like usual, he didn't let me play his NES—he made me watch him play. The game was bright and colorful, and I really wanted to play it, but he would not give up the controller.

Fast forward 20 years later, when I was just starting my collection. While shopping at a retro gaming store I saw the game. It was only around eight dollars, so I bought it. When I took it home and began playing it, I quickly realized it was very difficult. I was determined to one day beat the whole thing, and I was fascinated with how different each level was. That's when I came up with the idea for my blog. I would play old games I never had a chance to play previously and give myself a week to try to complete them. Unfortunately, I never beat it. Now, thanks to writing this essay, I have extra motivation to go through with it. —Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and blogger at raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com



Little Ninja Brothers

PUBLISHER: Culture Brain
DEVELOPER: Culture Brain
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990


Nintendo
LICENSED BY NINTENDO FOR PLAY ON THE ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
Little NINJA BROTHERS
CULTURE BRAIN
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality

Notable Quotable:
"If you put the Karate Kid and Bruce Lee together in a Saturday morning martial arts cartoon show, you'd probably end up with something like *Little Ninja Brothers*. This sprawling action adventure takes a charming, lighthearted approach to its blend of questing and karate chopping . . .plays much like the *Zelda* series, except there's more action." —*Game Players* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"As far as action RPGs go the game looks decent enough . . . Some foes, like the minotaur that randomly appears to fight you during combat, look fairly detailed. However, the animation of most things within the game fail to push the NES in any way . . .the sound effects are average, but the game has some catchy tunes . . .lacks diversity as far as enemies, the encounter rate is relatively frequent, and combat can get somewhat repetitive . . .not to mention that punch and jump attacks are effective against most enemies and limit the usefulness of other methods of attack . . .the game is still fairly fun. It incorporates mild humor and a friendly atmosphere that provides a fair challenge . . .more fun with a friend." —Gaming Sanctuary (www.gamingsanctuary.com)

The sequel to *Kung-Fu Heroes*, *Little Ninja Brothers* is an oddly humorous, high-quality game that is tough to find. It separates itself from the average RPG by giving two playable characters, Jack and Ryu, ability to punch and kick, making for an action-heavy game. Things begin with an overhead map view in which you walk around Chinaland, traveling to towns, homes, and castles. Random encounters with monsters engage either a turn-based command battle where you select attacks, defense, items, and the like, or more frequently, top-down, real-time, single-screen beat-'em-up action, where you can move up, down, right, and left. In addition to punching and kicking cartoonish enemies, including pigs, ghosts, gargoyles, and frogs, you can punch blocks and rocks to reveal such power-ups as throwing stars, dragon kicks, and a projectile attack. Other helpful items in the game include a skateboard, a whirlybird, and a dragster. Defeating enemies awards experience points and currency for increasing abilities and purchasing medicine, swords, and other items. The objective is to defeat Blu Boltar and the Yoman Clan to restore peace to Chinaland. In addition to the standard game there's a Field Meeting Mode featuring six different events: 50 Meter Dash, Balloon Popping Race, Athletic Race, Treasure Hunt, Eating Race, and Shooting Race. You can read about the sequel, *Super Ninja Boy*, in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 2 (N–Z)*.

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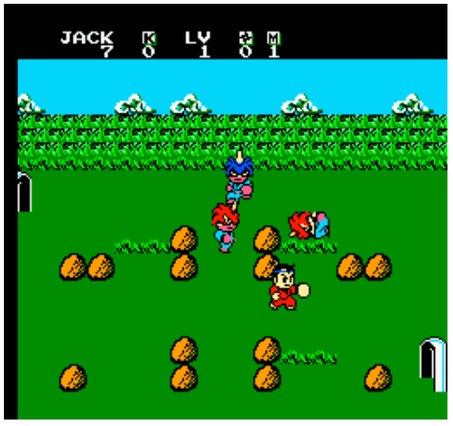

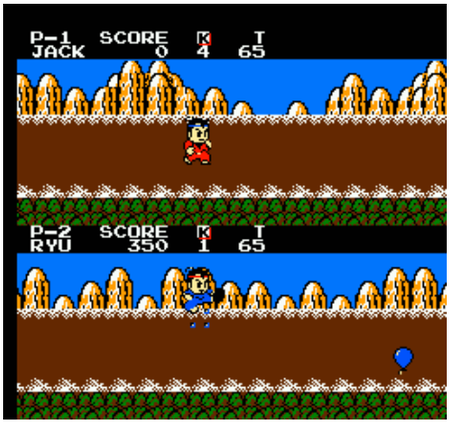

Little Samson

PUBLISHER: Taito
DEVELOPER: Takeru
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player
YEAR: 1992

Four distinctly different heroes must unite to save the kingdom in this excellent action platformer. The gamer guides said adventurers through castles, ruins, forests, jungles, mountains, and other nicely illustrated, monster-ridden, side-scrolling areas (there's vertical scrolling as well). The running, jumping, battling characters are Little Samson, Kikira the Dragon Lord, Gamm the Rock Lord, and KO the Enchanted Beast (the Lord of the Mice). Each has his or her own special skills, such as climbing walls, throwing bells, dropping bombs, flying and fire breathing, walking across spikes, walking through small areas, and/or punching. Collectible power-ups include replenishing health and extending the health meter, with each character having their own separate ones. Players must complete individual levels for each character, and afterwards can use all four. Those levels are designed in such a way that the player must determine when and where to switch between the characters, making for a good, strategic, action-packed challenge. Instead of each level having its own soundtrack, switching characters changes the sound to that character's musical theme. The sound effects are strong and satisfying. The bosses are huge and nicely drawn; an example of the outstanding graphics. The controls have a tight and fantastic feel to help you through the gorgeous levels. A highlight of the NES library, but a very hard game to find.

Notable Quotable:

"*Little Samson* arrived at the tail end of the NES era, when most gamers had moved on to newer—although not necessarily better—consoles. While it clearly adopted its non-linear level select structure from *Mega Man*, the similarities end there . . .one of the most technically impressive NES titles, featuring eye candy like rotating character sprites and colossal bosses in what was ultimately a futile effort to try and entice 16-bit smitten gamers back to their NES." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Little Samson* the 93rd best NES game

Notable Quotable:

"Expertly mixes platforming and combat with the strategy of the four characters. There's also a nice blend of vertical and horizontally scrolling areas to keep things fresh, and the controls are solid, too . . . The game is 'NES hard,' but at least your life is restored after each level, and there are passwords to continue your progress. The many bosses and sub-bosses are great and usually have multiple forms that include dragons, knights, and even the Grim Reaper. The graphics are incredibly detailed, with tons of rich textures and smooth animation, and the backgrounds are well-layered to create a real sense of depth . . .one of the best action platformers on the NES with its smooth gameplay, imaginative level design, and awesome boss battles. The ability to switch between characters on the fly is a great idea and the whole package is incredibly well executed and warrants multiple play-throughs." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

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Insider Insight: When most people hear of *Little Samson*, they think of the ridiculous amount of money the rare cart sells for. Sure, the graphics are stellar and the gameplay is top-notch, but it's the rarity of the game that the majority of gamers know about. Personally, I'm an avid NES collector who has been trying to complete the NES library for more than 10 years now (while on a budget), so *Little Samson* was a title that I thought I could only dream about. One night a few years ago, I decided to hop on eBay and send some "lowball" offers to people who were selling the game. A Spanish-speaking seller replied and said that if I was willing to help him with his English papers for school, as well as send him a Limited Edition Legend of Zelda 3DS, he would send me his *Little Samson*. I thought he was crazy, but this was probably my only chance to get the game at a low price, so I agreed to his terms. After three months of helping him with his schoolwork he sent me *Little Samson*, and upon receipt I sent him the 3DS. It was a perfect transaction! The seller and I became good friends and we still keep in contact with each other. I love owning the game, but the story behind how I acquired it is worth more to me than the cart itself. —MikeVito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

Lode Runner

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
GAME TYPE: Climbing/Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (alternating)
YEAR: 1987

Lode Runner is based on Irem's 1984 arcade game, which itself is based on the 1983 computer classic. The game has players guiding a Galactic Commando up and down ladders, over brick platforms, across ropes while collecting gold and dodging enemy robots. After collecting all the gold, players should climb a ladder to the top of the screen to exit to the next level. The Galactic Commando is equipped with a laser drill pistol for drilling holes in the brick, letting players trap enemies or send them falling through the brick floors. These holes, which refill after a few seconds, are also used to reach areas beneath the player. Puzzle elements come into play, as players must plan the proper routes to collecting the gold without getting stuck in an area. Most versions of *Lode Runner* feature 100 or more levels, but the NES rendition contains just 50. Also, players can't save the game boards they have edited. Unlike the original computer game, the NES rendition scrolls a little to the left and right, meaning it's easy to walk into a trap or get blindsided by an enemy. Despite these weaknesses smooth controls and classic challenges make the game loads of fun.

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Notable Quotable:

"A well-known title to any self-respecting gamer . . . One of a handful of games which has remained extremely popular for years . . .highly challenging . . .will test your concentration and ability for quick movement. The graphics and color are quite good and comparable to earlier computer versions." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)

Notable Quotable:

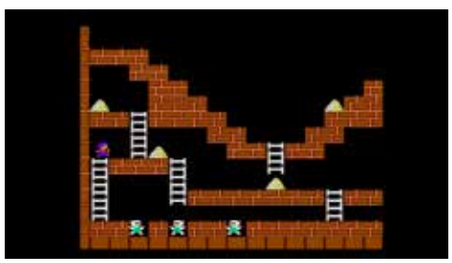
"The original *Lode Runner* is a classic among classics. It revolves around simple gameplay mechanics but with surprising depth. I've never been a big fan of the original graphics—the stick figures and crude sprites never had much appeal to me. This is why I especially like this Hudson Soft conversion—they brought their own ideas to the table and created a game with real personality, charm, and style." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

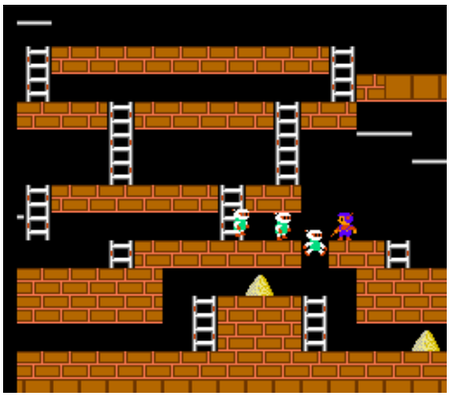
Notable Quotable:

"Takes a brighter, more cartoon-like approach to things than the old computer versions. Overall it looks OK, but as a very early NES release, you're definitely not going to be blown away by its technical prowess . . .same deal with the sound, which is passable, but not especially catchy or interesting . . .addictive and exciting . . . Mind teasing never goes out of style, and the fast-paced digging puzzles you'll face in *Lode Runner* make it one of the better Virtual Console releases, even if it's not as good as the original computer versions of the game." —Jeff Gerstmann (www.gamespot.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii

Notable Quotable:

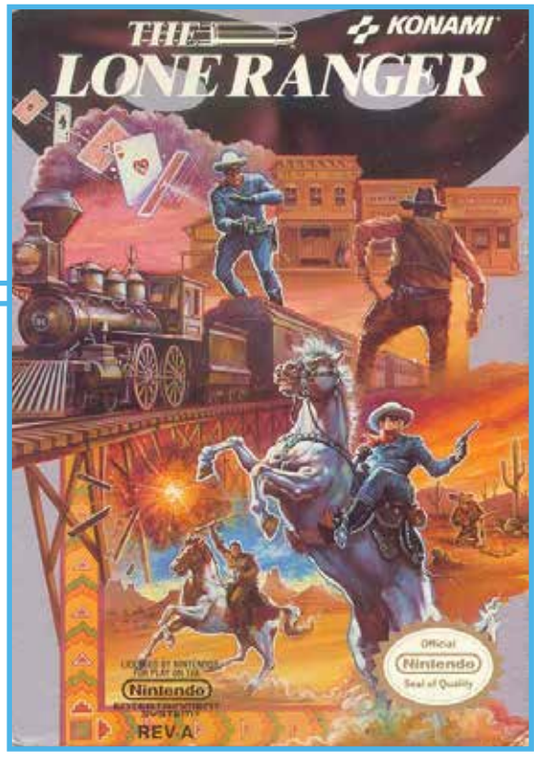
"The gameplay is as basic as it comes. You just avoid the enemies, collect all the gold, and use the ladder to get to the next stage—simple! It's all good fun for a while, but like many games of this era, it could use some extra game modes to spice things up . . . It's hard to knock this game too hard because there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the gameplay on offer. Our recommendation would be to skip this and get *Battle Lode Runner* [for the TurboGrafx-16] instead; only the most hardened NES gamer should be nostalgic enough to invest in this version." —Damien McFerran (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii





The Lone Ranger

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player
YEAR: 1991



Based on the classic television series (1949–1957), *The Lone Ranger* puts you in the role of a former Texas Ranger out for revenge his brother's death and rescue the president, who was kidnapped by Butch Cavendish. The game employs a staggering array of genres and viewpoints, from top-down action, to light gun shooter, to side-scrolling combat/platformer, to role-playing adventure. Aided by scouting reports from Tonto, "Kemosabe" must search buildings, caves, and mountain hideouts; ride his faithful horse, Silver; play poker; make friends with Indians; talk to townsfolk; shoot or punch bad guys to release money, extra bullets, and health hearts; and much more. The masked hero begins the game armed with his fists, a short range pistol, and a supply of bullets, but he can purchase extra bullets, silver bullets, TNT, and medium and long range guns. Compatible with the Zapper and the LaserScope Voice Command Optical Targeting Headset. *The Lone Ranger* is a hidden gem in the NES library and is very hard to find.

Memories: I picked up a complete-in-box copy of *The Lone Ranger* at a little mom-and-pop video store around 1997 or so for $1.99, when the store was making room for more PlayStation and Nintendo 64 games. Unfortunately, despite the excellence of the game and the cool box art, and the fact that I really enjoyed the TV show when I was a kid, I sold it on eBay a short time later. I really need to reconsider my life choices sometimes.

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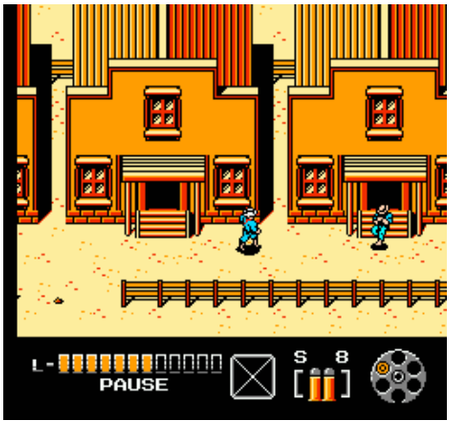
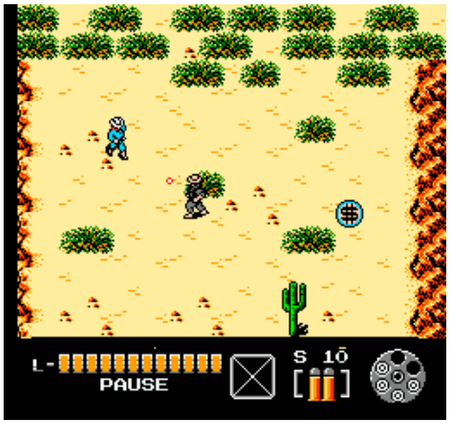
Notable Quotable:

"*Metal Gear* in the old west. You get the same combo of action and adventure text, with just enough mystery thrown in to keep quest fans happy. There's not an abundance of action to be found anywhere in this cart, but it's structured to deliver some adventure fun." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

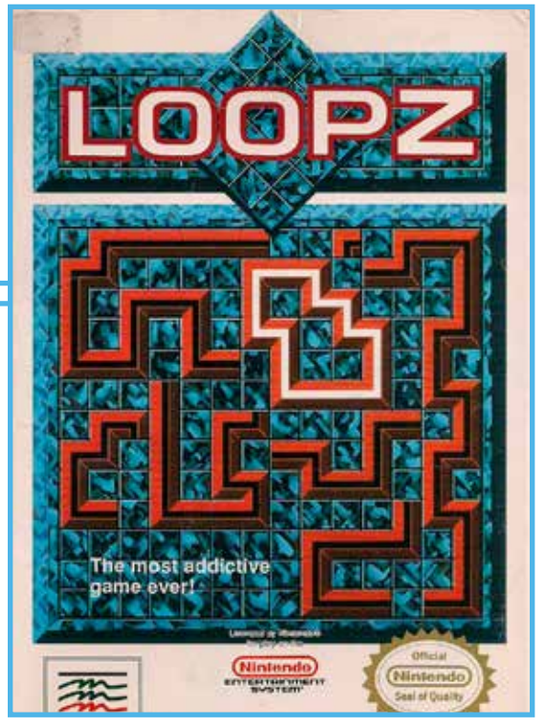
"I was ready to dismiss this game as yet another fair, perhaps even slightly underrated TV-to-game adaptation . . .but I must admit, this one's much more enjoyable than you'd expect. Not only does it look and sound great, but it feels like it genuinely cares about capturing the spirit of the old show and its characters . . . Fans of *The Lone Ranger* and westerns in general should find this game to be a real treat to play through, but everyone else should give it a go, as it's definitely one of those underplayed NES titles that deserves more recognition." —1 More Castle (www.1morecastle.com)





Loopz

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
DEVELOPER: Bits Studios
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1990

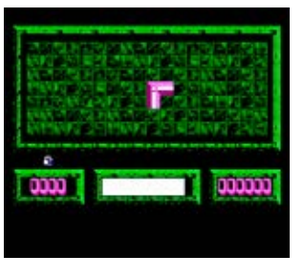


In *Loopz*, random puzzle pieces appear one at a time over a grid-like board (there are 50 boards in all), and it is up to the player to place them on said board. Each piece is either a straight line or a shape consisting perpendicular lines (L-shapes, T-shapes, U-shapes, and the like), and each piece can be rotated. The objective is to connect pieces to create loops (enclosed sections), thus making the pieces disappear. Bigger loops net more points, and pieces that are not in the loop (so to speak) stay on screen. Unlike the similar *Pipe Dream* pieces cannot overlap, and there are no clues given for the pieces that will appear next. A separate mode of play begins with the computer removing pieces of an already formed loop. Once the pieces have been taken off the board the player must put them back into place.

Notable Quotable:
"Immediately impressed with its clever gameplay . . . It's brutally challenging, but trying to get high scores is an absolute blast." —A.J. Maciejewski (videochums.com)

Notable Quotable:
"There was something mildly haunting about the way one can get hooked into making loops of all shapes and sizes, but unless you're a dedicated fan of puzzle games, playing *Hatris* late into the night unapologetically, there's no reason to let *Loopz* wrap itself around your brain for more than half an hour. It's a passing fancy, a mild distraction." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:
"It wasn't a bad game, surprisingly . . .strange *Tetris*/*Pipe Dream* hybrid . . . I wish the game would preview the next piece . . .it would have helped me plan out some better strategies. The graphics stink, and the music is nothing special, but *Loopz* has three different play modes and can be quite addictive . . . I like that in my video games." —Video Games 101 (www.videogames101.com)



Insider Insight: Despite appearing on many different formats, *Loopz* passed me by back in the day, and I only discovered it when I started seriously collecting about 15 years ago. The first version I played was the previously unreleased Atari Lynx port (officially published by Songbird Productions in 2004), and I fell in love with it immediately. In fact, I was quite upset the game had passed me by for so long!

When I started writing for *Retro Gamer*, I began researching software houses to profile as part of the magazine's regular "From The Archives" feature. The easiest place to start was by looking up people who worked for my favorite developers and publishers. This led me to researching Audiogenic, the original creators of *Loopz*, and I already had a former contact in ex-Atari UK Marketing Manager Darryl Still, who had previously worked for them.

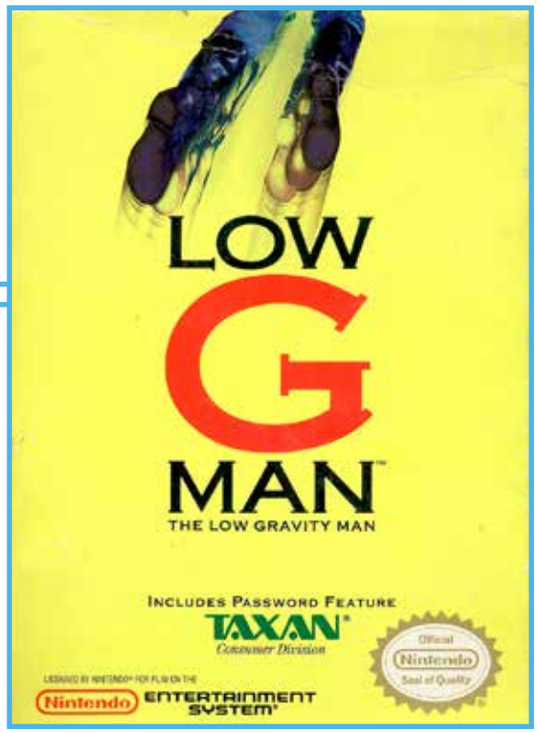
Before long I had an assortment of interviews, including *Loopz* creator Ian Upton and the game's producer, Gary Sheinwald, the latter of whom told me one of my favorite retro gaming related tales. The story goes that Jez San, whose company Argonaut was coding the Game Boy port of *Loopz*, had sent a copy to Nintendo in Japan (he was working with them on the Super FX chip and *Star Fox*) to look at. Then the first time Gary met Shigeru Miyamoto at the Las Vegas CES show, the legendary programmer smiled and said, "Oh! *Loopz* is my favorite game!"

Miyamoto wasn't wrong in his assessment, as *Loopz* is up there with the best puzzle games of all time and definitely deserves a lot more appreciation. You can't go wrong with the NES port, either—it's as good as any other version, and I still find myself humming the music from time to time! —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for over 15 years.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Low-G-Man: The Low Gravity Man

PUBLISHER: Taxan
DEVELOPER: KID Corp
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player
YEAR: 1990



Hostile aliens have programmed robots for war against humankind, prompting the Low-G-Man to take action. Equipped with a freeze gun to stun enemies and an armor-piercing spear to kill them, the high-jumping hero battles through 15 sectors, including mines, the ocean, mountains, a tower, a submarine, and industrial areas. Low-G can also acquire a boomerang, bombs, fireballs, and a wave weapon, along with invincibility, double shot power, healing potion, and low gravity, which makes him jump higher. It's usually best to save the special weapons for the battles against bosses, some of which are massive. Red potions will decrease your health, so beware. Low-G-Man is a small character, but jumping two screens high is fun, as is the game in general. One of the more enjoyable aspects is that you can kill robot drivers to capture their vehicles, including Walker, who fires a machine gun; Spider, who kills enemies with a touch; and Hover, who drops bombs.

Notable Quotable:
"Slightly above average action game that could have been a rippin' cart if it wasn't plagued by choppy animation and tiny characters." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"One of the reasons this game is so good is that there's a bit of strategy involved . . . It's huge, it's playable, it's challenging, it's ingenious, it's original, it's beautifully designed, it's great looking, and it's totally, totally compulsive . . . Gorgeous backdrops and stunning sprites, and there's so much variety . . . Frantic soundtracks and meaty effects add to the game's fast-paced action . . . Even when there was loads of work to be done I just couldn't tear myself away from this one. It shines in every single department." —*Total!* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"*Low-G-Man* looked rather a pathetic effort when I first loaded it up into our trusty NES. The sound is rather grating and the graphics look pretty gaudy. This isn't made any better owing to the jerky scrolling. But for some strange reason I found the low-gravity action really enthralling. I think it's perhaps because the game's difficulty level is set at just the right level. It took me about three-quarters of an hour to get onto the second level, but the time spent wasn't frustrating at all. It's also a good laugh trying out all of the different weapons and purloining the armored transports from the robots." —*Mean Machines* (December 1991)

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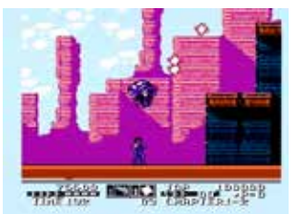
Insider Insight: As a kid I was willing to rent virtually any game for the NES. The console was such a HUGE step up from what I was used to playing on the Atari 2600 that nearly every game was something completely new to me.

One Friday evening my father, my younger brother, and I went to the local West Coast Video to rent some movies on VHS, as well as an NES game for us to play over the weekend. There really wasn't much available that day except for some sports games (ack!) and *Low-G-Man* so we picked that one, despite the lame cover art.

To our amazement, the game was actually pretty fun! The ability to jump super high to attack flying enemies with your polearm was a little tricky at first, but once we got the hang of it, it became second nature. Being able to commandeer the vehicles of slain enemies was rad, too. I really enjoyed the colorful graphics and catchy music, but it was the unique gameplay that enthralled me for two days. I played it virtually non-stop.

Sadly, finding a copy to purchase was difficult. The usual stores we'd frequent (K-Mart, Venture, Toys 'R Us, Service Merchandise) either didn't carry it or were always out of stock. It wasn't until a couple years later when I visited the KB Toys in the local mall that I found a copy for sale (on clearance for $15!). I snatched it up and played it for nearly a month straight in a futile attempt to complete it. The game was insanely hard for someone of my skill level at the time, but that didn't stop me from repeatedly trying to beat it.

Low-G-Man is a diamond in the rough on the NES, and it's still one of my favorite games on the console. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber, Filmmaker, and Gamer



Lunar Pool

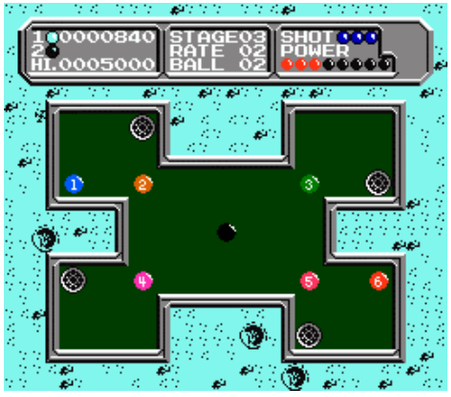
PUBLISHER: FCI
DEVELOPER: Compile
GAME TYPE: Sports/Billiards/Futuristic/1 or 2 players (simultaneous)
YEAR: 1987

Is pool not futuristic enough for you? Try *Lunar Pool*, which features 60 tables displayed horizontally and viewed from an overhead perspective. Unlike regular billiards in the present day, there are tables of varying cuts, such as an arrow, an L-shape, and a V-shape. In addition, table friction can be altered, determining (at least in part) how far a ball will roll when hit. The objective is simple: set up the electronic cue stick, take aim, select shot power, and shoot the cue ball into various numbered balls in hopes of knocking them into side pockets. Chaining together multiple successful shots in succession gives you more points. Some of the pockets, depending on the table, are obscured by bumpers, adding to the alternative nature of the game.

Memories: Although I've been obsessed with video games since 1975, my dad never played a single game with me; however, he did shoot pool with me a few times. In fact, he spent a lot of time with us playing basketball, football, and baseball, as well as watching such TV shows as *The Twilight Zone*, *Wonder Woman*, and *The Incredible Hulk*. He just wasn't into gaming. Not even a little bit. Maybe I should have asked him to play some *Lunar Pool*.

Notable Quotable:
"The colors for the game are bold and defined, though the pockets do look like sinkholes . . .graphics are well-defined . . . The controls are about as simple as they can get for a pool game . . .basic jaunty music and sound effects . . .a decent enough pool game. . .a fresh take on the pool game genre." —UKNESBOY (uknesboy.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Plenty of variation . . . We especially liked the fact that you can move around within the 60 screens, allowing you to sample tables you wouldn't see for quite some time if you always had to start with screen one . . .all the ball graphics [are] clear, crisp, and colorful . . .a very nice change from some of the other games coming on the market for Nintendo . . .will give you a strong challenge with a good deal of fun!" – *Computer Entertainer* (September 1987)



Insider Insight: One summer day decades ago, a neighbor of mine invited me over to play this cool new NES game he got. I asked him what it was, and he said I had to see it to believe it. Not being the kind of person who would turn down a chance to play a mystery NES game, I hopped on my bike and rode over to his house. His stepdad had gifted him one of those knockoff "100-games-in-one" carts and we were justifiably amazed. We turned it on and were taken aback, discovering how many games we had never heard of. We loved taking turns looking at the list of titles and trying to figure out what they were about. When we came across *Lunar Pool* I was certain it was going to be some sort of sprawling sci-fi adventure about finding some sort of mystical pool, like the Fountain of Youth in outer space. Turns out it's just billiards on the Moon. Not as impressive as I imagined, but it's still pretty fun! —Kris Randazzo, host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, writer at *Nintendo Force Magazine*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Power Glove: It's So Bad

by Zoe K. Howard

"I love the Power Glove. It's so bad." —*The Wizard* (1989)

In 1989, Nintendo was riding high as the dominant force in the still freshly resurrected video game market. None of the competitors could hold a pixel to the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), so it came as no surprise the console got more than its fair share of third party peripheral devices to try and enhance the experience. Of the many devices, both creative and mundane, only a handful stood out. The Power Glove was not only one of the few with the highest potential, but it planted the proverbial seed in the virtual gaming market that would grow since its creation.

The origin of the Power Glove was based on the work of two men. The first, Thomas Zimmerman, was interested in creating computer generated music. In 1981, his quest led him to create his first optic glove, which could measure LED light bending in a hollow tube inside the fingers of the glove. A computer program would measure how much light was still exposed and react to the information with programmed responses. In 1982, he patented the optical flex sensor. Jaron Lanier, the second pioneer, was trying to create an easy-to-use graphical interface that would allow users to learn computer development visually. Lanier felt Zimmerman's glove was just what his program needed. It allowed his program to focus on the programming aspect and let the glove serve as a visual learning tool. The two joined forces and created VPL (Virtual Programming Languages), a company focused on the development of virtual reality. The term "virtual reality" was coined by Lanier in 1987.

With the company up and running, an engineer named Young L. Harvill at VPL replaced Zimmerman's optical flex sensor with optical fiber wires and two magnetic sensors on the back of the glove. The optical fiber wires eliminated errors caused by the line of sight optics of the optical flex sensor and greatly improved the glove's accuracy. The magnetic sensors made it possible for a computer to track the glove within a small 3D environment. The new and more accurate glove, named the Data Glove, garnered attention from many computer companies and potential users.

Abrams/Gentile Entertainment (AGE) licensed the Data Glove for use with some 3D gaming ideas they had been working on. Many of their earlier ideas were scrapped due to hardware limitations of the time. Not wanting to give up on the glove, AGE employee Christopher Gentile turned his attention to making the glove work with the Nintendo Entertainment System. He felt the glove still showed a lot of potential in video games. Using a Macintosh computer for programming communication between the NES and the glove, Christopher used the Data Glove to control the action of NES characters.

With Christopher Gentile's success in using the device to control Nintendo games, AGE ventured to find a manufacturer for the new glove. AGE brought the peripheral to Mattel, the creator of the Intellivision home console. Mattel was apprehensive about re-entering the video game industry after the Great Video Game Crash of 1983. Despite the company's apprehension, Jill Barad's interest in the presentation brought Mattel around. Her reputation as the person who helped save Mattel with her work on the Barbie and She-Ra: The Princess of Power toy lines convinced the board at Mattel to take a chance once again in the video game market.

With Mattel onboard, they sought out Nintendo for official licensing of the glove. Aiming for a Christmas '89 release, Mattel didn't have much time to pull the entire project together. Nintendo, however, did not see the benefit of the glove controller and declared it gimmicky and too complicated for children. After some back and forth Nintendo agreed to the licensing of the Power Glove. Their main request was that Mattel include detailed instructions on how to set up and properly use the glove. Mattel agreed, and included large picture instructions with detailed information on how the glove functioned.

Mattel began working on not only the design for the glove, but also games that would work with it. The device was aimed

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at being able to play all of the NES's currently existing library, yet no exclusives were in production. Mattel enlisted a man simply named Novak who was currently working with them as a designer and project manager. The first exclusive game was set for release simultaneously with the Power Glove. It was a beat-'em-up called *Bad Street Brawlers*, developed by Beam Software. The game was purchased from its developers and fitted with new code that would allow the game to work with the Power Glove specifically.

While game adaptation and production were underway, Mattel strategized on how to offer the Power Glove at a reasonable price. Due to the complexity of the Data Glove it sold for upwards of $8,000. The optical fiber wires that ran through the Data Glove were replaced with flex sensors that used semi-conductive ink. The ink allowed for data to be collected from the flexing fingers by stretching the pathways. Imagine having a rubber band attached to the top of your finger; the flex sensor would stretch just like the rubber band when you flexed your finger. The magnetic sensors also had to be replaced. They substituted the magnets with two small speakers that could bounce sound off of the three-point receivers placed on the television.

This system would allow the sensors to detect the glove moving in the x, y, and z axis, as well as the glove's roll and yaw. With these adjustments the glove could be produced for around $25. The basic design allowed the glove to be plugged directly into the NES controller port. Any further inputs needed were designed into the top of the glove's control panel. The low build price allowed the Power Glove to retail for $75.

In October 1990 Mattel released *Super Glove Ball*, a simple game where the player uses the Power Glove to maneuver a floating hand on the screen within an 8-bit virtual world. The objective was to grab the floating balls and send them back at targets. While Novak served as concept creator, producer, and lead designer, the game itself was developed overseas by Rare. *Bad Street Brawlers* and *Super Glove Ball* are the only games to be listed under the Power Glove Series. They are also the only games that do not require codes to be entered to use with the glove.

Three other games were supposed to be created for use solely with the Power Glove, but the peripheral failed commercially and was discontinued before they ever saw the light of day. Only one game was ever seen publicly and that was on a video tape showing off the Power Glove. The game was *Tektown*, a science-fiction title where a floating hand maneuvered around a space station. The other two proposed games were *Glove Pilot* and *Manipulator Glove Adventure*.

While initial sales of the Power Glove were promising, the controller found itself with negative feedback from reviewers and gamers alike. Many reported the games not responding to the glove at all. Delay between an action and the in-game effect was an issue as well. The codes were also finicky to enter. While the instructions had listed the input codes for the games they had set up on the Power Glove, there was no way to update the machine or the codes for later releases; however, you could input a code for similar games for certain titles. For example, you could potentially use the *Super Mario Bros.* code for later platformers.

To market the Power Glove Nintendo used every method at their disposal. Two of the most memorable examples were from the company's media division. In the *Captain N: The Game Master*, a cartoon that premiered in 1989, the Power Glove opened up a dimensional gate at the beginning of every episode to bring the hero into the video game world—a fun metaphor for what the glove was supposed to do in real life. The same year also saw the release of *The Wizard*, a feature film showing off Nintendo's properties (both first- and third-party) and various games for the console. Sure, the movie was essentially a giant advertisement, but the Power Glove was specifically shown off in one of the movie's most memorable scenes. Every retro gamer knows Lucas's immortal line, "I love the Power Glove. It's so bad." The film also served as the unveiling of *Super Mario Bros. 3*.

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The issues gamers were having with their gloves were difficult for Nintendo to ignore. The Power Glove was hard to use, just as the company predicted, and it was less than responsive or accurate in maneuvering on-screen images.

Speaking from personal experience, my family often got fed up with the Power Glove and just started using the controller built in on the top of the arm of the glove. It didn't take long before the clunky sensors and often unresponsive controller were tossed aside for the standard NES controller. It was simply too much effort to keep the device working properly for minimal positive results.

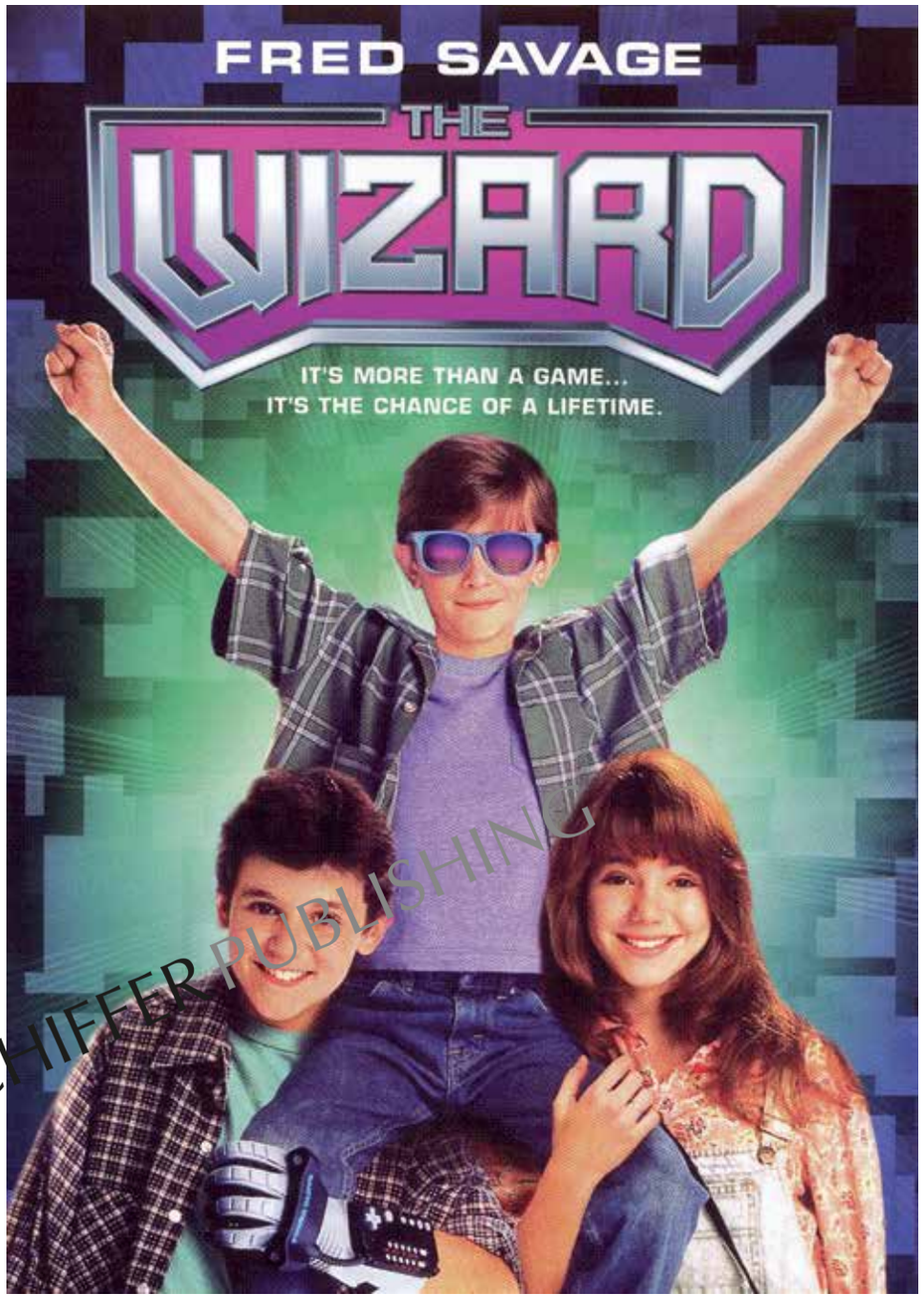
Mattel pulled the plug on the Power Glove before the holiday season of 1990.

Far more impressive than the one-year lifespan of the Power Glove is the legacy it left behind. Nintendo would continue to toy with the idea of virtual reality. The Virtual Boy stood as another early failure for the company as they continued to try and push the envelope in game design. The Wiimote—the controller for the Wii—and the Joycon—the controller for the Switch—use styles of judging virtual space similar to what the Power Glove did decades ago, but far more successfully

The Power Glove faded into obscurity almost as quickly as it arrived. The Sega Genesis was already out in Japan, and the Super Nintendo was due to be released in Japan the same year the Power Glove was discontinued. The NES had maybe another two years of life before the Super Nintendo would catch on, helping make the Power Glove a poor investment for c[illegible]ers.

Despite its negative reputation, the Power Glove has lived in pop culture pretty much since it was released. Who could forget the Power Glove parody in the 1991 horror classic *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*? Now you are playing with power, indeed! In 2006 James Rolfe, a.k.a. The Angry Video Game Nerd, famously mocked the peripheral. There was even a documentary on the device called, fittingly enough, *The Power Glove* (2017).

While the Power Glove wasn't the first virtual-reality device, many credit it for delivering the concept to the mainstream masses. Dreamers, inventors, and creators have been inspired by the Power Glove and have built upon the original concept. A concept that has helped pave the way for the boom in virtual reality and the impact it's had on the world of gaming. The Power Glove, though a failed experiment, will always lend a hand to secure its place in both video gaming history and American pop culture.



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– Zoe K. Howard is a freelance writer and accomplished video game critic. In 2012, she and her partner, Wanda Calamia, began the YouTube show *The Retro Gamer Girls*, where they celebrate their love for classic gaming. The duo quickly became advocates for equality and supported anti-bullying campaigns amongst gamers. In 2014, Zoe and Wanda were awarded with a Twin Galaxies Video Game Trading Card, representing women in gaming. Zoe is the creator and founder of Retro is Life, (www.retroislife.com), a gaming hive and review website that creates a platform for gamers to explore and experience current games and trends, all while maintaining the preservation of the games we loved as kids and revere into adulthood.

The Comic Book Video Games of the NES

by Blair Farrell

The NES was home to some great licensed games, but if you went to your favorite rental store back in the day and grabbed a game from the shelf strictly because it was based on a movie you loved, chances are you were in for a long, disappointing weekend. This was also the case for many titles inspired by beloved superheroes and comic books, with many being cursed by the dreaded LJN rainbow insignia. Even the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles—the hottest property of the time in the capable hands of Konami, by way of their Ultra subsidiary label—had a rough start. Many gamers found out they weren't alone after sharing their grief with others upon watching YouTube videos from the Angry Video Game Nerd, who suffered through the dreaded damn stage and couldn't make simple jumps.

In the case of the Turtles, though, things got better a short time later. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game* was far from a one-to-one conversion of the arcade game it was inspired by, was a good enough representation of the arcade game you could play at home alone or with a friend. For those who were lucky enough to own it, not only did you get a fun TMNT game, but a Pizza Hut personal pan pizza, absolutely free! The success of the NES version of TMNT II convinced Konami to make another arcade brawler game starring the "Heroes in a Half-Shell"—*TMNT III: The Manhattan Project*—this time built from the ground up with the NES in mind instead of being a lesser quality version of an arcade game.

Most people were introduced to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles through the animated series and had no knowledge of its comic book roots. That was true for several other excellent games that many were introduced to in similar fashion. *DuckTales*—a Disney-produced show inspired by the comic book adventures of its main character, Uncle Scrooge—was turned into a video game by Japanese publisher Capcom. *DuckTales* is easily among the top games for the NES thanks to its mixture of unique platforming mechanics where you have to bounce on foes using Scrooge's cane as a pogo stick and diverse levels that capture the globetrotting adventures of the show and its iconic soundtrack, in particular the beloved theme for the moon level that was used in the incarnation of *DuckTales* that launched in 2017.

DuckTales would get a sequel, but it went unnoticed by many when it was new, as it was released when the majority of players had moved on to the Super Nintendo. It eventually became a sought after cart on the secondary market, commanding collector prices. Luckily *DuckTales 2*, along with the original and four other games, were compiled into the *Disney Afternoon Collection* by developer Digital Eclipse in 2017 for modern consoles and PC.

Another cult favorite that took the route from comics, to animated show, and eventual video game is *Bucky O'Hare* from Konami. Set against the backdrop of an ongoing space war between anthropomorphic mammals battling an armada of toads, *Bucky O'Hare* is a wonderful action side-scroller that fans of Capcom's *Mega Man* series will appreciate. As with *Mega Man*, *Bucky O'Hare* lets you pick the order in which you complete its levels. Instead of claiming weapons from defeated enemies, though, you liberate your captured crew, who then become playable characters, each with their own unique moves. The one-eyed android Blinky, for example, can temporarily fly with a jet pack and smash blocks in the ice world. Bucky's four-armed fowl companion, Deadeye Duck, can climb up walls to reach places his crewmates can't.

Of course, it's impossible to talk about comic book themed video games without discussing the Big Two: DC and Marvel. DC's iconic Superman came to the NES courtesy of publisher Kemco, but it's nowhere near as super as the character's namesake. Though it featured some interesting, non-linear design concepts that feel like what modern open-world games would become in a way, such ambition is wasted on a game where Superman's on screen sprite is represented in the chibi art style and has to take the subway to get around Metropolis instead of flying. Superman was supposed to get a second chance on the NES from Sunsoft before they lost the license and converted the game into a wholly original concept, Sunman. Ironically Sunman wouldn't see the light of

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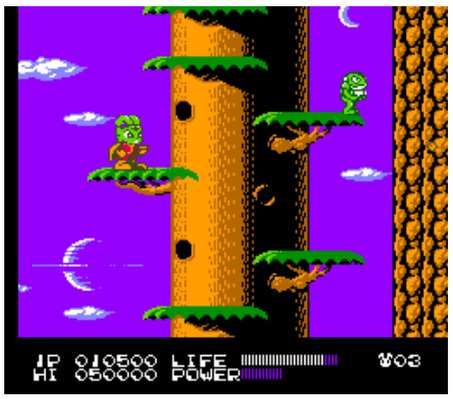


day, but its completed ROM was found in the hands of a European collector and was eventually put online for people to play through emulators.

When people think of [illegible]oft and superheroes, they rightfully thi[illegible]*atman: The Video Game*, inspired by Tim Burton's *Batman* movie from 1989. Though its relation to both the film and the comic book source material is loose at best, the game even today is recognized as one of the best titles featuring the Caped Crusader. Toy maker NECA in recent years even made an action figure inspired by the colors of the game's character sprite.

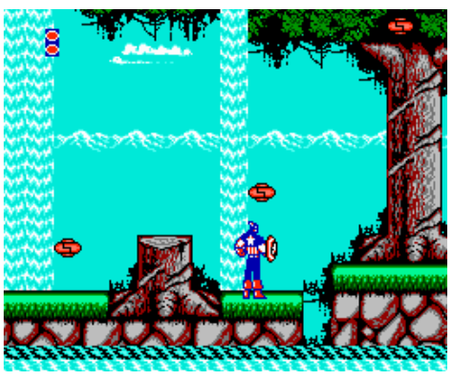
Tim Burton's *Batman* would get a sequel, but before that Sunsoft delivered *Batman: Return of the Joker*, a game that deviated even farther from the source material than *Batman: The Video Game*. In Batman's NES debut he relied on his fists, a few gadgets, and Ninja Gaiden style wall jumps. In its pseudo-sequel, the Dark Knight trades all that in for jet packs and guns. If you can overlook how unlike Batman it is, *Return of the Joker* is an incredibly fun action side-scroller. Batman would eventually return to his brawling ways in *Batman Returns*—this time from Konami—in a game far more like the film on which it is based. *Batman Returns* is highly reminiscent of Konami's TMNT games, in that it plays like an arcade beat-'em-up, but there are vehicle segments where you take control of the Batmobile that help break the pace of punching clowns in the streets of Gotham.

Marvel is a powerhouse today due to the success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but on the NES the company struggled to have a quality game based on their stable of characters. Silver Surfer starred in a brutally tough shooter where its best, and only good quality was its soundtrack. LJN squandered some of the biggest superheroes of all time, like Spider-Man and the X-Men, in best forgotten efforts like *Spider-Man: Return of the Sinister Six*, an awkward controlling side-scroller, and *The Uncanny X-Men*, a barely functional top-down action game. LJN does deserve some credit for making an okay solo Wolverine side-scroller and *The Punisher*, an interesting take on the light gun genre where you must be mindful of the character's position onscreen.

Perhaps the best Marvel game on the NES starred characters that are far more popular today than when the game was released. *Captain America and The Avengers* morphs Data East's arcade brawler into a side-scrolling action game where players control Captain America and Hawkeye. What makes this title stand out among the other Marvel video games on the NES is how accurate to the source material your characters are. Cap can charge at enemies with his shield and throw it at enemies in the distance. Hawkeye can shoot arrows in multiple directions, and they can be powered up to have an explosive effect. Unlike Spider-Man's debut both characters control great, and the levels are designed in such a way that you have to be smart about when you use each character.

There were many disappointed players back in the day who rented or purchased games starring their favorite comic book characters. For every lousy LJN title, though, you had something like *Batman: The Video Game*, *DuckTales*, and the second and third TMNT games that showed the potential these characters have as video game stars. With no real template from which to work, developers had to figure out how to translate fantastical worlds and superpowered characters to the interactive medium. From these missteps, game makers slowly, over the years, learned how to accurately portray superheroes in video games to the point where they're now some of the best selling titles on the market. You don't get to modern games like Marvel's *Spider-Man* or *Batman: Arkham Asylum* without the pioneering efforts on the Nintendo Entertainment System.

– Blair Farrell is the creator of Comic Gamers Assemble (comicgamersassemble.com), a website dedicated to comic book themed video games. Since that time he has published more than 1,000 articles—everything from editorials, to features, to reviews of comic book flavored video games, both past and present.



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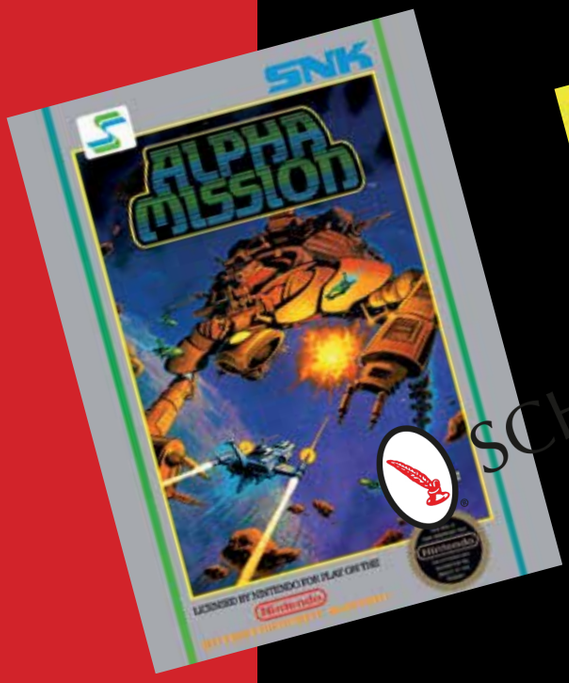

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